

PERSIA:

Romance & Reality

By the Same Author

THE COTTAGE BY THE COMMON

PERSIA

Romance & Reality

by

O. A. MERRITT-HAWKES

1935

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DEDICATED

TO

*All the Persians and English
who made my life in Persia easy and
pleasant, but especially to the Englishman who
knew the East but did not like it, and
to the Belgian who understood
the East and therefore
loved it*

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Note

THE Shah Pahlavi has ordered, by a decree issued early in 1935, that Persia shall, from March 21st, 1935, be known as Iran. Time is on the side of this change, for Persia was called Airya in the Zend-Avesta and Ariana in an inscription of the time of Darius (521-485 B.C.). These two words are modifications of Arya, meaning noble or venerable, by which both Indians and Persians knew themselves when they moved from Central Asia to their respective countries.

The first contacts with Europeans were in the reign of Cyrus (559-529 B.C.), who was king of a great district called Pars (Fars), hence the Greeks called his country Persis, although before he died his empire had extended far beyond Pars. Europeans have therefore known this country as Persia since about 530 B.C.

This change is an expression of the new nationalism, a determination to decide their own name instead of accepting one from Europe, a proclamation to the world that the nation is Aryan.

The word Persia will remain a part of our language, for we cannot lightly and happily relinquish its many pleasant and important associations in history, literature and art.

Introduction

THERE was something laughable about setting out for Persia from Manchester. Persia, at that distance, was still a land of roses, nightingales, jewelled trees, nectar-like fruit, sunny days and superlative love—whilst Manchester?—That was a city where the sun never shone and people, a little crude, made unbleached cotton sheets!

Magic carpets were obviously the way to get to that Eastern land and yet the agent never mentioned them. I had decided to choose one of the silk carpets dyed a lovely blue, on which graceful gazelles passed their life in spring-like dreams as they skipped over bunches of flowers. It was to be big enough for me to unpack my luggage comfortably and the Magi who were to act as pilots were all to be well shaved.

And yet the Manchester Canal also had its romance. One man had thought of this waterway to the sea, another had carried out the plans, put water where there had been dry land, erected great storehouses, set up picturesque cranes, stretched Babel-like grain elevators to the sky. After a couple of hours along the canal my magic carpet became a simple childish thing, of no importance compared with the complexity of life behind the great gates of the spacious docks.

I was the only passenger on the cargo boat, I was the only woman not only on the boat but in all those miles of docks. It was a queer kind of isolation. The life I led at home ceased to be real when the boat sailed away. The men were not in the least like those I met on shore and I was not like their women, so that in this new life, which lasted for five weeks, I ceased to be a woman and they never became men. I don't know that we were even quite human beings to one another, only some variety of living things that were going somewhere. At times I felt like a spirit wandering not in a zoo but in a nature reserve and some of the men thought I was an intruder into their domain.

Those weeks passed pleasantly and quickly: there were dawns and sunsets, rough seas and smooth, glances at Portugal, Spain, France, Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily, Italy, Crete, Africa, Arabia. In five weeks the moon is born, grows up, dies and is born again, a matter of no small importance when it falls upon a glassy Persian Gulf, in the month of March when the temperature is perfect and its only rival the glorious phosphorescence.

The so-called romance of the East and its undoubted attractiveness is largely due to it having been the source, for centuries after our first contact, of many luxuries, for quite literally it then produced the spices of life. Everything was charming, nothing debased by being too useful or common, it sent oranges not apples, silks not wool, fine incenses and perfume to deaden the smelliness of Elizabethan and Stuart days, pearls and gold. Mere distance is not the chief factor in romance, for the United States of America is even further away and no one has ever suggested that they were romantic. Day after day I read what men had written about Persia, and when I arrived I knew that a great deal of twaddle had given false ideas to those who stayed at home. Consider camels: in the distance, against a sky at dawn or sunset, they are amazingly picturesque but near they are ugly, smelly, bad-tempered, and, except when their fur has been freshly removed, very untidy. Their table manners are disgusting and their lips, and teeth too, are like those of a man who is a confirmed tobacco smoker. There is plenty of colour, new and graceful lines in Eastern clothing, but unless you have a heart of stone, a non-functioning nose and a super-romantic incapacity to recognize facts it is impossible not to be depressed by the poverty, the disease, the cruelty, the transitoriness of life.

The Easterners are not deceived by the value of the handfuls of frankincense, pearls, gold, spices which have meant romance to the West. They wish to become civilized, by which they mean Europeanized, for they too have their romance *of* the West! But, unless they are very wise, they may be more seriously deceived by what we really are than we have been, by what we have imagined them to be.

Glossary

ANDEROON: Part of the house where the women live.

CHADAR: A large black shawl-like covering worn by the women.

CHAI-KARNEH: A tea-house.

DOMBEK: A drum made of metal, wood, or pottery, shaped like a squat vase.

DUGH: The whey from mast which is mixed with water, often flavoured with herbs and frequently iced.

GHANNATS: An underground channel which brings water from the mountains to almost waterless towns in the desert.

JUBE: The gutter by the side of the road in which there is, whenever possible, flowing water, either all or part of the day.

KALYON: Water pipe.

KHARNUM: Lady.

MADRESSAH: A school.

MANGAL: A metal tray on legs for burning charcoal.

MAST: Curdled sour milk.

PAHLAVI CAP: A cap with a peak which was ordered for all men by the present Shah Pahlavi.

PICHÉ: A stiffened horsehair eye-shade, used to cover the face. It is usually square and attached to a cover for the head which holds it in place.

RABENDEH: A long white cloth, fixed over the face and extending nearly to the feet, in which there is a small piece of drawn-thread work through which the women look out.

ROGAN: Butter boiled with a little flour. The sediment is used by the peasants, the solid fat sent to towns for cooking. It varies from sweet to highly rancid.

SAQQA-I-KHANEH: A religious drinking fountain, which must never be touched by a Christian.

SIGHEH: A temporary wife.

TAR: A musical instrument with four strings.

I have much pleasure in thanking Major John Teague, O.B.E., M.C., who was studying Persian when I was in Ispahan, for advice about the transliteration of most of the Persian words.

I am also indebted to the *Birmingham Post* for permission to reprint certain stories.

BUSHIRE: A COLONY OF PERSIA

EVERYONE in Bushire explained that it was not Persia—one bright man even said it was no more than a colony; further, I would only see real Persia when I reached Tehran. Most people in most towns said the same, and Tehran really believed it was Persia. But Tehran and most people were wrong. Capitals in all countries have prestige and conceit, but Tehran outdoes, in both those characteristics, any city I have ever entered. Few Persians travel, so they do not know their own country.

Bushire can be seen a long time before it is reached, for the boats have to anchor eight or nine miles out. From that distance it is merely something very flat, brownish with bits of green, that has only just managed to be land. I was a little worried about how I was to cover those nine miles of sea, which can be so rough that strong men have turned back to the land. Passengers have been dropped into the dhows by cranes, and one woman, for safety, had been deposited among bags of sugar when the waves tossed the dhow up to a level with the deck. But we anchored when the sea was perfectly calm; and England, who may be a severe father but a kind mother, had sent the consular yacht to take me to land. That British flag did make me feel safe—so safe that I could not believe tales of hold-ups, shoot-ups, malaria and other annoyances.

But when the low morning sun made rainbows in the exhaust steam, I knew all would be well. Rainbows followed me all those miles, not big ungetatable ones, but a small tame, domesticated kind that you could put in your pocket. When we reached that shabby brown coast with its shabby hybrid human beings, there was a real Englishman with nothing hybrid or shabby about him. I was afraid to tell him that I had pockets full of rainbows, but I learnt later that he would have understood. Presently a car took me the eight miles to Sabzabad, where I was to stay at the British Residency, for there is no hotel in Bushire and the local substitute is both odoriferous and insectiferous. I believe

missionaries have stayed there, but that's all right for them as they are spending eternity in heavenly mansions. It was a lovely drive, for I had reached Bushire in spring, just after there had been rains. The corn was unbelievably green, and among it, in some fields, were dainty blue lilies which had the fairy-like qualities of our bluebells but a finer shape; in others, there were quantities of small reddish gladioli, and yet other pieces of land were covered with a wild lavender stock which was a misty veil by day and a delicious perfume by night.

I stayed at the Residency for ten days, my life ordered by that amazingly capable Mrs. Fowle, wife of the political resident, Colonel Fowle. I've no doubt I made a number of mistakes in Persia and in this book, but without her guidance I'd have made a great many more. She did try to put me on the right track.

Sir Aurel Stein, the well-known Sanscrit scholar and archaeologist, was staying there too; although seventy years old he was vigorous, almost young. He was particularly delightful because of his deep fund of kindly humour, which bubbled up even when discussing the most erudite subjects. In spite of his fame and honours he had a pleasantly diffident manner which at once put the most unlearned at their ease, a charming way of listening to the ideas and opinions of any person with whom he came in contact, and the gentlest way of dealing with fools. But I learnt to know that a little flicker of his nostrils meant that someone was, from his point of view, talking first-class nonsense.

He was anxious that the Eastern countries should have an education which would make it possible for them to accept honestly and with self-respect the known facts of their history and development, in order that they might have the correct basis for a right understanding of their future policies.

How much this was needed I realized during the subsequent months in Persia, for many Persians are very conceited, distort facts to support that conceit, and refuse to acknowledge the truth on which alone their future progress depends.

I was taking a photograph of a statue by the pool in the Chihil Sutun at Ispahan, when a man spoke in excellent French.

'You are taking that because it is the most beautiful sculpture in the world, aren't you?'

'Why, no. It is charming, it is interesting, but it certainly is not the most beautiful. What made you think that?'

'Foreigners all say so.'

'Perhaps you misunderstood, or they were ignorant, or wanted to be very polite.'

'It is well known that all our arts have been better than those of any other nation.'

There were many men like that, but there were also others who saw things in juster proportions. But, if we also are to be just, it is necessary to recognize that the eastern European and middle-east nations need to compensate themselves, somehow, in the face of our enormous successes, in the obvious world of machines, in the means of enjoyment and amusement as well as in the less obvious sphere of culture. We can provide so much, that it is difficult for them, not being philosophers with an appreciation of values in terms of millennia, to retain their self-respect and self-confidence without rather overdoing it. What is the use of us having all our advantages if we cannot be impartial? Why complain that the Persians have no historical sense if we, too, cannot judge a people in the light of historical sequence?

There had been incidents down the coast, and Sir Aurel had, temporarily, to give up his researches. The Quashgai, one of the semi-nomadic tribes, are an ingenious, capable people who gave up their old rifles when the Shah insisted upon disarming them and promptly disinterred the new models they had bought. Everybody who had visited them, when they were in a peaceful state of mind, found them delightful, but when they wanted to fight they were apt to hit the bull's eye, so Sir Aurel had been sent to shelter. Sooner or later, to ensure peace, a great many of them may have to be killed. But the Government is anxious to bring peace without further bloodshed. A man at the top said, 'We realize that the Quashgai are our people, a part of the nation. They may not see it like that yet, but they will. Persia needs them, and they need Persia. The war against the Lurs was terrible; we don't want to repeat that.' Indeed it would be a great waste to kill these fine people, but the tribesmen will not see that times have changed and that nomads can no longer be allowed to get by thieving and violence what they are unable to earn in a peaceful modern way. It is said that when a man presents himself as a suitor, the girl and her people demand, "How many have you killed? What have you stolen?" and if he says nothing, they laugh scornfully.

'You are no man. She wants a hero,' say the relations.

'I want a he-man', says the girl.

Everyone who has ever come into contact with them admires the bravery and resourcefulness of the Quashgai; the women are not

puppets but industrious and capable, the head woman organising, with efficiency, the carpet weaving in time of peace and care of the wounded in time of war. In spite of their immense gay voluminous skirts they can manage a horse with any one and gallop over the hills to help their husbands and sons in battle. Many of the women are very beautiful, and fascinating too, for they look at one boldly, confidently and honestly, perhaps almost with a challenge as if they wanted to say, 'Which is the better, you, a foreign woman, or I, a tribeswoman?'

But to conquer the Quashgai is difficult; they have hundreds of miles of mountains and few roads, so that the soldiers who come to clean them up must be as hardy and as capable of tackling the slopes as their own sheep and goats. If only the Government could capture the pig-headed leaders the people might be saved.

The year before there had been a terrible drought, the crops had failed and animals had died by thousands. The Government had sent 5000 tons of grain from Mohammerah to be used as food and seed, the Governor of Bushire had requisitioned money from the few wealthy of Bushire and had brought 2000 tons of wheat from Basra, 2000 from Kermanshah, and from other places had come 2000 tons of wheat and 1600 of barley. Water, too, had been brought down from Mohammerah to be distributed to the people in skins. It was said that nobody had died of starvation, but an enormous number had become terribly thin. It was pitiful to see the old people and the animals. Some of those who distributed grain were accused of having put their hands into the bags. The Governor had also pushed forward the making of a new road along the coast from Bushire through Lingeh to Bundar Abbas, but there wasn't enough money to employ many men.

The roads about Bushire were not very safe. One night when out driving the chauffeur said, 'Better crouch down and I'll drive fast; this is a favourite corner for shooting'. It was romantic and adventurous, but, on the whole, it is more pleasant to be sure of a night's sleep than of a funeral.

A month later, after I left, there were a series of robberies committed by men of a neighbouring tribe who lived in the foothills. They were hungry and desperate, for it takes more than one harvest to make up for a famine, and years to get back the animals which provide them with so much of their daily food and their saleable products. To put these people on their feet the Government would not only have had to provide grain but thousands of beasts. But, although the robberies took place when I was at Shiraz, a distance of only twelve hours by car,

there was no certain information, and when some English told the Persians what had happened, they refused to believe it and accused the Europeans of inventing anti-Persian propaganda. It was only four months later, when I met someone who had been robbed, that I learnt the truth.

It is very difficult to realize the large amount of isolation in Persia. Everyone is a Persian first, but he is also a Kermani, a Meshedi, etc., with great enthusiasm and great faith. He has an enormous amount of local colour which is interesting, and local ignorance, which is annoying.

Until the last eight years, journeys between towns were very long and very dangerous, so that few people travelled. They are still long, often tiresome and exhausting, but only here and there are they now dangerous. There are Persians who say it is safer to travel along their roads than in Piccadilly or Chicago. Any foreigner who reads certain of our newspapers might suppose that was true. I am glad that I've not been held up in either Piccadilly, Chicago or Persia, but the Persian authorities take the very wise and satisfactory precaution of not usually allowing foreigners to go along a road where they know there is trouble. There is no doubt that the time is rapidly coming when all the main routes will be safe. In the meantime, no one need fear to travel in Persia. Shah Pahlavi has done his work well.

Today it is not so much the difficulty of travelling but the lack of a cheap and easily obtainable newspaper that isolates towns and people. There are newspapers in cities of any size, which have a very useful educational function, but they are intensely local. Tehran has several papers, but they can only be obtained by sending a subscription to Tehran itself. The result is that the newspaper-reading public is very small, news trickles through slowly, if at all, and the country is always full of rumours. Newspaper censorship is very strict, and newspaper men are little better than puppets in a Punch and Judy show. The Shah is extraordinarily ill-advised so entirely to crush criticism and facts.

Bushire was a brown city, tumbling down in one place, being built up in another, very poor, fairly smelly, and with only very few moderately decent roads. But the Governor, a charming, capable man, was doing wonders—there were street cleaners, a number of schools, and one traffic officer; the latter was very annoyed with me for taking a photograph of a man sweeping the streets, as he considered I should have taken him, as a demonstration that Bushire was rapidly becoming like Tehran. But how can you keep the streets decent, when no sooner

has the cleaner passed than a woman throws out a heap of broad-bean skins through her door and her children use the narrow alleys as lavatories? The chief objection to Bushire children was that they were precociously developed sexually and made no effort to hide either their desires or their performances. No wonder so many are impotent at thirty.

Bushire has several useful institutes left from the hated English occupation, one good road, a hospital, a plant for electric light and another for distilled water. There was an ice machine too, but that is out of order. The hospital was handed over to the Persians, but when I visited it, although it was scrupulously clean—there were even puddles on the floor after the morning wash-up—there were very few patients, and much of the apparatus and the instruments looked as if they were more ornamental than useful. There was so much obvious illness that the empty beds seemed odd; the doctor said no one would come into hospital at No-Ruz, the great yearly holiday which was just due, but the out-patient department was very busy. There was a small maternity hospital in a good position on the front, but after a year of being in the hands of an entirely unqualified person, it had been shut up. It takes three things to make a successful hospital—a building, a staff, and patients. Years are needed to wean the peasant woman from the super-Gampish ways of the local midwives, and clever, patient doctors to do the weaning, but some of the medical missionaries have succeeded.

Malaria is the curse of Bushire, but the natives prefer treatment to prophylaxis; they will swallow tons of quinine, and enjoy hundreds of injections, but they won't cover up the little pool in every courtyard where mosquito larvae gambol undisturbed. Enlarged stomachs, produced by enlarged spleens, are everywhere, and when a woman isn't having a baby, a constant occupation unless they have a venereal disease, they look as if they were. The water supply, which appears so horrifying to the innocent outsider, is so individual that there are rarely destructive epidemics; any central supply would, under present conditions, be actually dangerous. Rain only falls a few times during a restricted part of the year and is collected from the roofs in deep cement pits, the *ab-anbar*, made in the courtyards, where it may be stored for years. If one *ab-anbar* gets infected it does not spread to the neighbours.

The Governor very kindly sent one of his servants to take me round the bazaar, and glad I was, for I was sure I should have been cut into little pieces for souvenirs. They knew and were used to the few Euro-

pean women who lived in Bushire, but I was something fresh, and my interest in the people and shops was a little surprising. At first I felt upset when the servant not only yelled at the people but kicked them away, but at the end of two hours I would have been glad if he'd had as many legs as a centipede and each of them provided with a hoof. I wasn't yet hardened to the fear of insects, so when I saw a man open his shirt and carefully remove some of his parasites on to the ground, but never killing one, it was trying to have him come near.

In the bazaar I realized how much negro blood there is in Bushire. At one time there were a large number of negro slaves brought from Africa, chiefly from Mosambique and Zanzibar: some of the people looked as if they had stepped out of an Assyrian frieze, their hair was in such regular tight curls. The Bazaar was interesting, as they always are in Persia, and there I had a good introduction to the contrasts of this nation which is changing, quickly in some parts, slowly in others. There was an old cobbler with a proud, aristocratic face, his beard dyed red with henna, mending a shoe slowly, with dignity, his clothes black on one side because he was pressed against a heap of charcoal and dusty on the other from broken tobacco leaves. But his personality seemed entirely detached from and unspoiled by his surroundings. There are still many Persians like that; perhaps it is the quality which has made it possible for several great religions to originate in Persia.

There are only two terrifying sights in this land, men with bright red beards and men and women with teeth all covered with gold, looking as if they were Molochs about to have a baby-feast. I once spent an hour with a head master whose clothes were like those of a Methodist preacher, his skin rather dark, his eyes bright, dark and round like a cock robin, and *all* his teeth bright with gold. If I had stayed longer I would surely have believed in the evil eye.

Every barber's shop at Bushire and a great many of the *droschas* at Shiraz had mirrors with an advertisement of Ansell's brewery and Tennant's beer and stout. Those firms must have sent out boat-loads of mirrors, but now their advertisements were simply annoying, for beer was on the list of prohibited imports and so almost unobtainable. Advertisements of various kinds were popular, as decorations, no doubt to distract the customers, but one shop had, in the most conspicuous position, a crowned Madonna and Child next to the European lady with a 'crown-of-glory' supply of brown hair which ornaments more than half the cups, saucers and ash trays in Persia. Small coloured prints of the same female, a sort of mixture of Lady Godiva and the

Woman taken in Adultery, were a favourite in the pocket-books of young men, who would show them to me when safe from the observation of both Persians and Europeans. They always blushed and asked, 'She is very beautiful, is she not?'

One barber was busy with European clippers on the donkey-boy while the donkey stood on the pavement, waiting very impatiently. Clippers did look out of place on that scrubby, shabby boy. I stopped to watch, but had to pass on, for the barber was so interested in me that he cut the air one minute and the boy the next.

The innumerable small restaurants all had Western meat choppers but an Eastern supply of flies; however, some of the men were doing their best to be hygienic, for as they wielded the chopper with the right hand they manfully tried to fan away the flies with their left.

There, too, I saw how cooking could be done with a very little wood or charcoal. If the people hadn't made that into a fine art there wouldn't be much cooking in this almost treeless, coal-less land. There is coal in Persia, but it will be of no use to the majority until they've altered their fire-places, kitchens, and chimneys; Persia has the same problem as Japan. For the charcoal there are two necessary adjuncts, a small tongs and a fan, the former to arrange the bits to the best advantage, the latter to overcome their dislike of burning. There was a great variety of restaurants, some selling fish, some only fish-heads, some providing good meat, and others, for the porters, the poorest of all the workers, who bought only heads and feet of sheep.

Of course there were lots of tea-shops, decorated with ladies in semi-European clothes, drinking wine and showing a great deal of leg, or European *prima donnas* in the architectural hairdressing of the gay nineties. Whilst Melba looked down from the wall, the gramophone produced Persian music. Many officers, all unshaven, were sitting on the wooden benches covered with carpets, most of them eating sunflower and other seeds and spitting the shells out in a very untidy manner. The sight of bits of shell sticking to their lips, their bristly chins and distributed on their coats made me realize the value of the Russian regulation against the sunflower-seed habit. Soldiers came to the tea-houses to ask their officers to sign reports, and several were instructed to do up the buttons of their coats or trousers. The number of quite decent Persians who go about with their trousers undone is astounding. One European, who had been here a long time, said he realized how easily one is influenced by environment when he found himself, rather a dandy in Europe, doing the same.

The economic strangle-hold of Russia was evident in bad lamps, innumerable aluminium tea-pots and gay but inferior cotton materials.

The old bazaar was very narrow, just a tiny space between the shops on both sides, kept cool by a covering of bits of corrugated iron or date palm leaves. It was full of primitive industries. In one place there was a bow with a cord twisted round a piece of wood to make it spin. The operator of this contraption, holding a chisel between his toes, deftly worked the wood into such articles as penholders and potato mashers. In the part of the bazaar devoted to bedding there was the constant, thin, whining noise of the bow used to beat wool until it is fine and soft enough to be made into the wool covers (*lahof*) which take the place of blankets.

This old bazaar was dirtier than the new, for there really wasn't room to sweep, but there was a beginning of cleanliness, for some shopkeepers covered the dates with paper to keep away the flies, and one immense sweet shop had a small boy sitting among the trays, fanning hard, his toes curling round the bright-coloured lumps of sugar.

There were two principal vegetables for sale—very minute broad-beans and very immense tough-looking lettuces. Persians won't look at big broad-beans and have servants who take the skins off the little ones! Half the peasants were walking about eating lettuces, some of them carrying a little bowl containing vinegar, in which they dipped the leaves. At the end of those two hours I was quite worn out and more than ready to get back to the Residency where the bright sunlight was controlled and there were no noises or smells.

What peace!

• 2 •

SCHOOLS OF SOUTHERN PERSIA

THE BEGINNING OF EDUCATION

AT Bushire I began to study what Persia is doing to wipe out her dark ages. Educational ideals have made their way slowly from Europe to Tehran, and still more slowly along the bad roads that lead from the capital across deserts and half a dozen mountain ranges until they reached this port on the Persian Gulf. Six years ago two girls schools for 200 pupils were opened amongst its 40,000 inhabitants; not much, but a beginning.

The girls learn to read, to write, to do a few sums, to see maps and know how small Persia is in the big world, whilst from their simple

history books they also learn how great she once was, so that their nationalism may burn more brightly. In these schools are sewing-machines at which the girls sit proudly, as they make mechanical European embroideries, terrible *appliqués* of bad pink cotton on bad pink net, *broderie anglaise à la Singer*. They looked at me triumphantly, for this machine from the West was so quick, so clever. On the wall hung a piece of old Persian embroidery, six inches square; the ground was a bright turquoise silk, and the embroidery was pink roses in 'laid stitches'.

'Why don't you make beautiful embroideries as they did in Persia long ago?' I asked. The teacher and the students opened their eyes wide; they were a little troubled, for their visitor from the great West must be wise. They pointed to the machines, and the things they had made.

'*Chic*', they said, '*chic*.'

The schools were old houses in narrow lanes, now kept clean with a broom, a pan and a brush. They knew I was coming, so I don't know whether the perfect cleanliness and tidiness was ordinary or special. But it was certainly an ideal which would, some day, become an actuality. The girls were nearly all dressed in European-shaped frocks, badly cut, made by their mothers on machines at home. They sat two by two at a desk, and rose when I came in, giving a military salute.

One school was run locally and studied the Koran every day, the children paying a small fee, which increased as they went into higher classes. There were many types, from the pure Aryan Persian to nearly pure negroid. Most of the girls looked fairly bright; a few had a gay smile, one was perhaps a moron, but none were feeble-minded.

The tiny head mistress was the most shrivelled human being I have ever seen; her wrinkled face would have been quite anthropoid if she had not had such bright blue eyes. She wore a European blouse pinned with several cheap brooches, a piece of black stuff which might have been a European skirt, black cotton stockings that wrinkled like an accordion up and down her thin legs, high-heeled black and white shoes, and over her head a thin lavender muslin veil, held together by another pin. Her hair hung down in a long thin plait. She and the other teachers held my hand in both theirs and bowed low. Their hands were very cool. As she took me from room to room, she picked up her veil and skirt coquettishly and moved her head from side to side like a bird, but I did not even want to smile as there was something pathetic about her withered, flirtatious ways.

One or two of the girls had bobbed hair, a symbol to them of some strange influence out of the West that produced women like me who had travelled far, had beautiful clothes, were not afraid and so learned that they knew the names of Persian Shahs and famous buildings in the school books! That they could find my visit so exciting made me realize the dullness of their lives.

The second school, run by the central Government, was free and more modern than the other, for the Koran was taught for only half an hour three times a week. There were 120 girls, some of them in a uniform of black and white check cotton, a strong and cheap material woven in Persia. Parents who sent their daughters here were advanced. Besides the subjects taught at the other school they had some natural history and a little hygiene. Some day those lessons will grow into a campaign that will kill the flies and mosquitoes that produce most of the disease of the district. Many will die first, but in the end there will be freedom from the present misery.

The head mistress here was withered too, but quite practical in her queerly made blue serge dress; she was eager that I should admire everything. She had prepared a little feast of tea, cakes, really antique chocolates, fortunately wrapped in silver paper (for the flies were numerous), and also a local confection made of sugar, pounded pistachios and flour, pressed into a mould which had the same type of charming design used on cakes in mediaeval Europe.

The school had once been a magnificent building belonging to a rich merchant, who now preferred to live out of the town as he had a good car. It was decorated with complicated glass windows, fine 'gatch' work on the walls, and paintings on the ceiling, where the classic but unhappy Persian lovers, Meijum and Leila, had gazed at one another for three hundred years. When I looked closely at these the head mistress nearly wept because she feared I despised them, but was a little scornful that I should admire anything which had become so decrepit.

When I asked to take a photograph of the courtyard the faces at the windows disappeared, for no man may ever see your photograph in Bushire. Before I left, the girls stood round the walls of the garden, whose chief ornament was the grave of a Muslim saint, whilst the head girl (who was charming and spoke French), and two mites each with a bunch of nasturtiums and stocks, stood in front of me. The girl read a little speech in Persian, bowing each time she said *salaam*, and the babes presented the flowers. I hastily looked in my notes

to say a proper Persian thanks; others had to make another little speech to express their gratitude because I had used their own language.

When I reached home the house-boy translated the speech thus:

'The school mistress salaams the lady, very like come see-a me, see-a my ola school. I very like-a not terrible anything come lady in Persia, hope-a lady come back-a her home safe. All Persian men, alla Persian women, alla Persian soldiers very like-a lady come Persia. I hope-a all Persian school children a speakin good English, good French. Hope-a Riza bring-a all Persia in school.'

The French-speaking girl talked a long time: she was terribly unhappy to be in Bushire after two years in Paris; here she had to walk in the darkness of the *chadar*, here she could never find a husband who was 'civilised'. She felt no inspiration in helping these girls to understand a freer world; she only wanted to escape to Tehran, that city to which the Persians turn as if it were an earthly paradise. She was typical of many of the students who come back from Europe, feeling alone and unhappy because they do not have the spirit of service which would have made them realize that they could help in the regeneration of their country.

Some of the girls were fifteen and would soon be married, for a law passed two years ago had raised the age to over fifteen, but some would never marry as there is a shortage of men in Bushire. Then their education would cease, they would become prisoners either in yearly maternity or in the hands of a cruel destiny which would infect them with severe gonorrhoea, and which would allow only one son or none. My Western eyes looking on could see only a chance of the happiness which comes from the love of a child, but I knew that Western eyes might be very blind in the East.

All the afternoon I thought of the strange head mistress and at night I heard the tale. Thirty-five years ago she had been a Circassian beauty brought as a slave and trained to be a dancing girl in the local harem of a rich man. He had taken her to Tehran, where she had learned to read and write. When the wind of fate had blown her master into the gutter she could not find another, so went Lesbian ways until fate blew again and made the dancing girl into part of the force that is transfiguring Persia.

The next day I was taken to a show school, a big boys primary school, where, when I entered, they were all busy saying the mid-afternoon prayer; but that didn't prevent them turning their heads, and

whilst still in the attitude of prayer, looking backwards through their legs at the stranger.

The boys were all dressed in regulation khaki, so looked very pleasantly tidy. As I went into each class-room the head boy jumped up and made a furiously fast speech of welcome, repeated the number of students in the class, and maximum and minimum ages. I was hard put to it when asked to examine a tiny class of boys studying English, not to let on that I didn't understand a word they said! The whole of the school, like most in Persia, was in the grip of the 'Programme', a hard and fast syllabus that came from Tehran quite regardless of the local needs, of local conditions and, most important, the capacity of local teachers. The pupils were learning far too much by memory and very little by thinking and reasoning. They were doing practical chemistry entirely out of a book: there weren't any test tubes, and nobody saw that a cup or a glass might be used as a temporary substitute. The office of the director had a number of natural history charts in French, but nobody knew either French or natural history. This series played the same ornamental part in a large number of schools.

But the teachers were doing what they could, the students were eager to know and everything was a vast step ahead of the old Mullah schools of ten years ago, where they only learnt Arabic, the Koran and some poetry. It would have been so much more cheering if they had been allowed to do a few simple things properly.

The next visit was to a tiny country school, in a village of two hundred people, which was so popular that in the lower classes four sat on a bench made for two. Many of the boys here were also in a khaki uniform. All were bright, seemed much more intelligent than the town boys and were most anxious to recite some poems of Sa'di and Firdausi. One boy read that poem about the ball of soap which smelt so sweetly that it seemed to have gathered to itself the fragrance of every flower. It wasn't just a mechanical performance, for the boy obviously felt the loveliness of flowers, so did many of the other pupils, and the masters took a frank and enthusiastic pleasure in the technical beauty of the poem and the charm of the idea. That was the first time I saw, as a living reality, the Persian love of poetry, of flowers, of sweet odours, not as something for the *élite*, but as part of the life of the people. A few days later in Shiraz, I was hardly astonished to see the one point-duty policeman waving on the traffic with a bunch of apple blossom. In those early spring days he had a fresh bunch of flowers

every morning and held it long after the ambitious sun had faded both petals and leaves.

The masters were very anxious to do their best for these country children, some of whom, since the famine, were none too well fed.

The boys drilled smartly, having been taught by a young soldier who, in his spare time, was learning English. They also played soccer, 'the one football' the master called it, and had six matches a year.

The friend of the head master left his business in the town that he might explain the Sufisi meaning of the poems which the boys recited. He said that poetry had been the basis of all Persian education in the past, but could not be so important in the future. 'We must now be practical as well as poetical, or we shall make a failure of our country.' He believed in the local and world influence of Sufism as the mainstay of human brotherhood.

'The Sufists want only goodness between all peoples. The Great War would never have been if all had the ideas of the Sufists.'

But what a personal history he had! As a young man he had been such a confirmed *débauché* that his relations had wept in despair and his mother had shown her grief in the conventional local manner by howling, shrieking, wailing and tearing her dress. He was so handsome that by nineteen he was the father of many children, and his family found it impossible to afford the expense of dealing with the servants and their babies. The family wanted to find him a wife, and he ultimately consented to reform if they'd get him a fair woman who was elegant and educated. He went up to Tehran to inspect the chosen bride; several men wanted her, as she had wealth as well as beauty, but she, knowing his history, had preferred the handsome rake. He certainly could not have chosen more beauty, for his wife had a complexion as fair as a Dresden statue, beautiful dark eyes and waving brown hair.

Just as I was leaving the school a small boy asked to read a lesson which he had chosen.

'To be good you must be clever. If a man is unkind to you, you must not be unkind to him, but go out of your way to help him, and then he will be ashamed. Lies are very bad—they make the face of a liar ugly.

'Unfortunately there are many men who are friends to your face and enemies behind your back.'

The master patted the boy. 'You see we are teaching ethics', he said, and I knew that he, not the boy, had chosen the passage.

In this village, as in many others, there was no education for the girls. 'But that will come soon', said an ambitious peasant.

There and in many other towns I realized the truth of the saying, 'Today education is the religion of Persia'.

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VISIT TO A PERSIAN VILLAGE

AN INTRODUCTION TO VILLAGE LIFE

I WANTED to see inside a peasant's house in a country village, so the house-boy offered to take me to his house, which was in the nearest hamlet.

He came for me at three o'clock and together we walked down the steps of the great house, where much that was good in both East and West met to make life always bearable and often pleasant. The garden was gay with beds of red flax, nasturtiums and sweet peas, because, all day long, day after day, an ox, led by a man, drew water from a deep well.

Beyond the compound wall lay the flat and open country, beautiful at the moment, for enough rain had fallen to make the hard, brown earth produce barley and flowers. The land was irregular, for man is always making little ditches, little pits, to persuade the scarce water to flow here or there. None of the fields were regular or tidy, but the barley grew in irregular patches whose boundaries were set by strangely-marked stones.

We soon reached the village, a maze of small lanes running between walls twelve feet high, sand-coloured, made of loose stones and mud. Now and again a solid double wooden gate led into a courtyard with one or more houses. The house-boy lifted an artistically-made latch and we entered a messy, untidy yard with many heaps of stones, and in one corner a shed made of flattened petrol tins, covered with palm-leaf matting. That was the home of a cow, a couple of goats and a brown sheep, all friends of the family, all givers of milk and hair. Ultimately, they might become skins to carry water.

Around the top of the wall, green stuff was drying. It was not hay, but just weeds pulled from among the barley or out of the garden of the great house, twisted into two-yard-long strands, to be used for fodder when everything had dried up. Persia is a land where, in our use of the word, there are literally no weeds, for everything that is not

actually poisonous is used. As long as a plant will grow, it is so valuable that it cannot grow in the wrong place. Outside the towns women can be seen pulling up tiny dried plants to take home to the animals, and they don't forget the smallest leaf.

The animals were fed on dates, a little barley and even date stones broken and boiled for two hours. Well-treated animals had 5 lb. of dates a day; and, in order that good cream might be produced, they sometimes had cooked fish too. During the dry summer the animals are sometimes given only dates and fish, but there was no suggestion that fish-eating sheep and cows, like fish-eating birds, had a strong and unpleasant taste.

The house we were visiting had only one storey, with a verandah on which hung a number of smelly fish that were drying rapidly. The women of the family were standing in a row to receive me, smiling but shy. I said 'How do you do?' in Persian to the elders, but 'God will protect' when I looked at each child, to preclude any possibility that they might fear the evil eye of even a friendly foreigner. The wife was good-looking, with long, seductive Mongolian eyes. She wore an odd collection of Eastern and Western clothes, including silk stockings which were a mass of ladders, brought, no doubt, from the waste-paper basket of the great house. Two boys stood by her side, a baby girl was in her arms and another baby was coming soon. Her husband pointed to her proudly, for she was a prolific woman. The younger boy was wearing on his arm a beautifully-engraved small square box used to hold a piece of the Koran; but it was empty, as he had had a stomach ache two days ago and the Koran had been swallowed to ease the pain. This boy, aged four, went to his mother to take her milk, the house-boy saying with approval, 'Mother's milk cheaper cow's milk'.

The Persians *are* an economical people, even perhaps mean, but that must be regarded as a characteristic of biological importance when the struggle for life is so hard; they are always generous to strangers and guests. Country people will still kill their last animal for a traveller.

The room was 10 ft. by 12 ft., divided into two by curtains. One part held two beds for the parents and four children, and the other was covered closely with Persian rugs, and had, much to their pride, one chair and a decoration of broken wineglasses, also, no doubt, from the great house, an immense armless celluloid doll and a patchy mirror. The beds were wooden, with a mattress of woven palm leaves but no pillows. In winter the peasants have quilts made of teased wool which are warm, light and sometimes lively. Under the beds were wooden

chests and half a dozen hens. The latter were causing much excitement, as the family was convinced that one was about to lay, and they wanted to show the egg immediately it was produced. The hen behaved very prettily, and before I left a warm and absurdly small egg was laid in my hands.

In a corner of the bedroom, upon the floor, was a metal tray (*mangal*) on which a tiny charcoal fire burned, hugged closely by three teapots, two of enamel produced in Czecho-Slovakia and one of aluminium made in Russia. Persian tea is often boiled for at least twenty minutes; that kills the germs all right, but the tea is undrinkable (to me).

Some more women, all relations, pushed their way in, one holding a miserable baby tied up in rags until it was stiff. A very old woman now began to blow upon the charcoal in an eight-sided *mangal*, in order to cook the mixture of rice, lentils, peas, and herbs which was to be their supper. Between her puffs she sat up and sucked away at the local water tobacco-pipe, the *kalyon*.

They next produced a very thin girl, aged twelve, covered with bangles and imitation gold coins, who was about to marry her cousin, although the legal age for marriage is now sixteen. 'But Imam Zada, him only little village, not like big town', the house-boy explained. A new law is a very feeble thing in a country where tradition dies hard and where habits have a sanctity which law has not.

We crossed the yard to see the round, three-foot-deep cement pit, wider at the bottom than the top, where the bread is baked daily. The flour—often barley is added to the wheat—is made into little lumps of dough, which are pummelled flat by the right hand on a large cushion held in the left. When the dough has become a thin circle of twelve inches diameter, it is slapped against the warm sides of the pit, which is heated by a tiny charcoal fire at the bottom. The bread is soon cooked, and in goes another slab. In the excitement of having a foreign guest, some of it was burnt, much to the amusement of the numerous spectators. It is a long job to provide this main dish for a big family, and great skill is required in managing the fire.

The people eat, with the bread, a white curd cheese and immense quantities of a very hard and tough lettuce, and also radishes, leaves included. Meat is not for every day, but, unless the people are very poor, it is a Friday (the Islamic Sunday) treat. All the people who are lucky enough to have a milk-giving animal eat mast.

The house-boy was quite well off and had, some distance away, a

garden and gardener of his own, several cows and about twenty vineyards. Each vineyard at Imam Zada had four to six vines growing in a pit, and was surrounded by dead branches of a prickly wild plum, to keep away wandering animals. He was saving the money he made with the grapes to send his son to the Missionary College at Ispahan, where he was to be educated to become an important man, like the sahibs that the house-boy saw every day at the great house.

I thanked everyone and left the village. To the casual passer-by it was little better than a rubbish heap, but I had learnt that it contained houses of which people were proud; devoted mothers; and fathers who had ambitions for their sons.

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NO-RUZ

NO-RUZ, the great festival, begins at five in the morning on New Year's Day (21st March) and continues for thirteen days. It is a very ancient spring-festival; and is the only important annual, national holiday observed by the Persians. It is the historical equivalent of our Easter, but—whereas in the West, Christianity has so successfully domesticated the spring rejoicing that the majority of people would even be shocked to know its real origin—in Persia, the Moslem religion has not left the slightest impression upon this primitive rejoicing in the sun, fertility and re-awakening life.

On No-Ruz day the Shah sits on his Peacock Throne in Tehran, and receives all who are important enough to be received. Until a few years ago he used to give each one a golden coin. In the capital, the clubs, the restaurants, the hotels are gay, almost like an ordinary holiday in any part of the world. Little by little, slowly in remote places, quickly in large towns, No-Ruz is losing its old character and becoming merely a holiday with journeys to far friends and relations, local visits from house to house, as in Scotland and America, for there is a strong tendency to be ashamed of and despise these old habits. But perhaps some day in Persia, as has happened in England, the old symbols, after having been swept away, will be revived because of their picturesqueness and the satisfaction that comes to civilized peoples from feeling themselves in touch with the primitive.

Today, every shop, every house in England has its Easter eggs, but twenty years ago they were rare. What one European said is probably

true, 'Today, Persia, in her struggle against the old ideas, which means a fight against ignorance, dirt and disease, cannot afford the luxury of the antique'.

Although I reached Bushire a fortnight before the festival it was already dominating the thoughts and plans of all classes. The bazaar showed its coming just as our European shops foretell the coming of Easter and Christmas. The sweetmeat shops were gay, almost too gay, with intense pink, green and orange colouring in the many sweets. Cakes were shaped, for luck, like crescents and hearts and decorated with bright orange icing and pistachios. Saffron, that favourite flavouring, was everywhere, making the bazaars smell strongly—call it a perfume or a stink, it depends upon your point of view. Bunches of wild pink gladioli and red poppies stood in vases among sweets, vegetables, meat and flies. Long strings of dried yellow dates were festooned across the shops, and there were especially large quantities of dried prawns and shrimps, which looked awful, smelt worse, but actually tasted very good. Everywhere there were pomegranates, symbols of fruitfulness throughout the East, on account of their red colour and many seeds. They were always decorated, and sometimes entirely covered, with bits of gold paper.

Beggars developed a special trade at this season; in one hand they held a little tray on which was a tiny dish of sprouting barley or wheat, and in the other hand a vase of rose-water which they sprinkled over passers-by, saying, 'Allah is one God, Mahomet is his prophet'. This salutation, together with the sprouting corn, brought good luck, so in return the pedestrian put money, dates, herbs, sweets, cakes upon the tray. I was nearly drenched by the time I reached the end of the bazaar and did not smell very nice, for rose-water is not always as sweet as roses.

In the smaller towns, No-Ruz is, as it has been for centuries, not resplendent with public happenings, but intense with primitive and domestic feeling. Eating is important in this as in all festivals throughout the world, so, for days before, the bazaar is full of buyers and sellers, cooks are working overtime and housewives are too busy to be visible.

Every house must, if it can afford it, have a representative collection of the produce of the country laid out on a table, a chicken plucked but not cooked, a fish uncooked, a little of every kind of vegetable and fruit, not only grown locally but from all parts of Persia. In the middle of the table is a mirror on which is placed an egg, which should, according to tradition, turn round in the night at the moment when the old year ends and the new begins. The old say it does, the young smile

or are silent—that depends upon their degree of emancipation. The egg is the sun, the mirror the heavens. The old year does not end at the conventional midnight, but with the astronomical year. No-Ruz is the old Zoroastrian festival, celebrated in the famous friezes at Persepolis, hence a lamp is lit just when the new year begins and should be kept alight for two hours. This lamp is, even to many Persians, merely a symbol of brightness and hope, but those who know realize that the lamp on the table today represents the fire on the sculptures at Naghshe Rostam and the spirit of the God of Good, Hormuzd.

The first duty of everyone is to pay their respects to the head of the family, who now generally sits upon a chair instead of on the floor. His hand is kissed by all the members of the family, and he, in return, kisses their face, and hands them a coin; the relations then kiss one another, saying, 'The best of good wishes to you', a greeting which is world-wide at the New Year. In Ispahan, I do not know in how many other towns, the guests, upon arrival, have rose-water poured over their hands, and sometimes their heads.

In a country where *pardah* is still general, there has to be a good deal of manœuvring to allow both men and women to do their New Year duty and yet not permit the women to be seen by any men but their father, husband or brother. In the *anderoon*, where the women live, in the public room where the men receive their friends, one or more tables are laid with innumerable dishes of biscuits, sweets, nuts, fruit, a very large and Europeanized iced cake, hard-boiled eggs coloured red and yellow, stiff bunches of flowers, and a small dish of sprouting barley or wheat. In the more advanced houses the food is covered with a net, which may be plain or decorated with tinsel and embroideries, for everywhere there are multitudes of flies. The nuts are almonds, walnuts, salted toasted pistachios and filberts, and marrow and melon seeds.

On arrival the guests are given exceedingly strong tea in tiny glasses, without holders in the houses of the poor, with holders when people are better off; and in the homes of the rich there are heavy elaborate silver holders, each standing upon an elaborate silver tray. A great weight of silver and clever craftsmanship frequently takes the place of taste. In houses where Western influence is strong, the men have whiskies and sodas (when they can be obtained) as well as wine and the Persian spirit, *arak*. Everyone smokes cigarettes, and many the hubble-bubble, or *kalyon*, which is passed from mouth to mouth without fear of infection.

At No-Ruz everyone should have new clothes, but the men demand at least a new hat, that pill-box with a peak called the Pahlavi, which is the regulation headdress of all men. Weeks before, the hat-makers are all busy until the little shops are stacked high with completed caps, each with the owner's name on a small label. It is smart to have a cap made of the material of each suit, so an elegant young Persian needs as much room for his hats as an elegant European woman.

I began the day by motoring with a Persian to a large house outside Bushire, where there lived, not a family, but a family group. As we passed through the great gate, closely locked at night, for although life is safer than it used to be, it is not yet quite safe, I was presented with a bunch of nasturtiums, to enjoy their fragrance. In the big courtyard were a number of flower-beds, cultivated intensely, each surrounded by lovely turquoise, semi-circular tiles. A Persian, much better-looking than Ivor Novello, greeted us on the steps, and led us into a long room where two tables, loaded with the proper dishes, stood in the middle of the room, and round the walls, as close together as possible, were chairs and sofas, almost hidden under white covers ornamented with lace and *broderie anglaise*. The floor was entirely covered with Persian rugs, and curtains (*kalemkars*) hung over the long windows which were as near together as was structurally possible. The architecture and the furnishing were typical of many homes in Persia. They suggested a *petit-bourgeois* room that had wandered into the East.

The men, an uncle and a nephew, sat on either side of me, wearing their caps—it is rude to take them off in Persia, unless it is known that you have been so long in Europe that your head has become Westernized. The servant also wore his cap, and, having left his shoes at the door, brought in tea and, as usual, was astonished that anyone should not take sugar.

Sugar in their tea, in their sherbets, and plenty of it, is most important, but it has become very expensive, on account of the enormous tax, entirely devoted to the Persian railway project. Many of the poor have given it up altogether and others have to use it very sparingly.

At this house there was no net over the food, which was black with flies, but I had to eat one sweet.

The two men began a poetry competition. What a contrast! The uncle was dressed in a very new black suit, his face withered and lined, but his eyes still looked eagerly through his thick spectacles, whilst the younger man, smartly dressed in a light suit, was full of enthusiasm and vitality. One began by saying two lines of a poet and the second

had to follow with a quotation beginning with the letter with which the first had ended. Backwards and forwards the quotations flew, the younger helping the older when he hesitated. It was an immense test of memory; many of the lines had neither beauty nor particular significance, but if anything of outstanding charm was quoted, both the men forgot the game in their delight. The Persian sounds were soft and pleasant, giving a feeling of intellectual romance, making a gentle music—and yet those men looked mundane, the chairs on which they sat belonged to a stuffy, narrow life. Outside, the wind blew the date palm leaves against a pillar as if it were deliberately playing a tune, a bulbul hopped in the top of an orange tree, making its tender, caressing sounds; there was the constant creek of the wheel which drew water out of a well in order that there might be a garden, bright flowers and fair odours.

The game ended; the uncle went out that the nephew might bring in his women folk; there was the old mother, her skin a deep olive, her hair resplendent with henna for the festival, her head and body, but not her face, covered with the *chadar*, which, as she was rich, was made of heavy French silk; after her followed the wife, who was so fair that she might have been a European. Her hair was bobbed and she wore a cotton voile dress trimmed with masses of bead-fringe, a silk sports jacket, but no *chadar*. She was well educated and took an interest in poetry; the next was the nephew's sister, a slightly negroid type, wearing a pale pink *chadar* and great quantities of bracelets and odd jewellery. She looked neither modern nor Persian. There was also a sister-in-law, a girl with an olive skin, no trace of colour, curly hair, large brown eyes and the moon-face admired by the poets. Her *chadar* was a coarse net, thickly embroidered with sequins; when she held it round her face she looked charming, but without it her moon-face was remarkably like a dinner plate. Her velvet dress made her grotesque, as it was tight in all the wrong places. The last woman might have been a schoolmistress in a remote English country village, for she was fair, had thick spectacles and that kind of blue serge dress that is more a punishment than an adornment.

What racial mixtures those five women represented! But Persians accept, without prejudice, all shades of colour except black.

Five children came too, four girls and a boy, also all different types and colours; the boy alone was an average Persian with a pale brown skin, a fine aquiline nose, a refined, sensitive face. Several of them wore, round their necks, gold boxes holding charms, a piece of the Koran

or the prayer of an Imam. After we had all shaken hands, and that took quite a time, there was a noisy conversation, the nephew acting as interpreter. They then went away that I might meet the women belonging to the uncle. There was only his wife, a married sister and one child, all shy, dull and depressing, holding their purple and black *chadars* closely around them. Their hair was done in the ordinary Persian style, pulled back and made into a long plait that hung down their back. They soon left me in order to get completely covered, as we were all motoring to town.

The next visit was to the house of a successful merchant, where I was the one woman at a man's party. I sat at the top of the long, narrow room, unpleasantly near a gramophone which played European, Persian and semi-Persian records. About thirty men, of every shade of colour, filled all the chairs and flowed over on to the balcony. Behind the gramophone was a wax shop-window figure of a woman with bright yellow hair, very red cheeks, wearing a gay be-sequined dress and pink stockings but no shoes. It was a curious insistent presence of which I could not, even for an instant, be unaware. There is a tale that one of the Persian ministers, when on a visit to Europe, thought a present of half a dozen music-hall *artistes* would be a pleasant surprise for the Shah, but when he approached the ladies he was scandalized and astonished that they refused to sell themselves for exportation. In his despair at the combined charm and stupidity of European women, he purchased half a dozen shop-window figures instead.

Some of the men played a game with the numerous hard-boiled, coloured eggs. Each man takes an egg, knocks it first on his own teeth, next on the teeth of his opponent, and then each man takes turns at hitting the other man's egg. The man whose egg is broken first forfeits it. One man had eight eggs in his pocket when I left.

We talked, drank and smoked, whilst waiting for the arrival of the four Jewish musicians and a dancing boy, which was to be the crowning point of the entertainment. The leader was a wizened old man who played the *tar* and a *dombek*, another played a violin, a third a Spanish tambourine, a fourth a Persian tambourine, which is much larger, rather more shallow and has loose iron rings along the sides. The music was neither agreeable nor disagreeable, but it was certainly exciting, especially when the old man intoned some sweet, musical words, but he made many of those harsh guttural sounds which were always ugly to me.

The boy soon appeared, dressed as a girl, a comb and gold pin in his

waving bobbed hair; he wore a pale-blue silk dress trimmed with red frills on the skirt and round the wrists, and shapeless pink cotton stockings. He held minute cymbals in his hands. The dance was neither wild nor sensuous, but it certainly gave a great deal of interest, pleasure and erotic excitement to the guests. The boy's face never changed, except when he glanced, now and again, at one of the men. He ended with a series of somersaults, when it appeared that his blue knickers matched his blue dress.

At intervals during the dance there had been a little distraction owing to the entrance of the two small daughters of the host, who alternately had to be kissed and have their drawers pulled up. The father, like all Persian parents, was very demonstrative, even over-demonstrative.

Visits to a number of other houses followed, at which the same ritual was repeated. In only one was the host sitting on the floor, and that was not because he was too old-fashioned, but, being a miser, although a local millionaire, would not afford chairs. Cigarettes in Persian houses are the property of the guests, but he, to further demonstrate his character, handed them out one by one, and his tables did not groan with cakes and sweets.

The last visit was to one of the few literary men in Bushire, one of the six men in the town who had as many as three hundred books (English, Persian and Arabian) in his house. There were shelves in those recessed arches which give such a pleasant effect to Persian houses. Some were in a second room, which he called a library, where there was nothing else except the carpets which covered every inch of the floor, and the remainder were in his second library, where, on the floor, lay a large number of empty lemonade bottles next to a beautiful white metal jug and a heap of odd papers. The bedroom opened out of this room and contained seven beds in a row, all close together, all provided with mosquito nets. Here the whole family slept, including the servants, although there were plenty of rooms in the big house. This man was well educated, a rationalist in religion, having a good knowledge of both Arabic and English. He was so modern that he did exercises every day to keep himself fit, and insisted that his children, including his daughters, should do them too. His ambition was to translate into Persian Smiles's *Self-Help*, Lord Avebury's *The Pleasures of Life* and Aristotle's *Ethics*, in order to make up for the lack of ethical ideals in the Koran.

This man was, to his English employers, merely an excellent inter-

preter; that is typical of the gulf which so often stretches between the Persians and the Europeans, but which can only be bridged by the *united* effort of both nationalities. In every city in Persia I met men of a similar type, who loved books and ideas, who wanted Persia to regain her old intellectual place in the world. These men were never conceited, but they were quietly sure that Persian ability, given the opportunity, would one day blossom gloriously.

No-Ruz rejoicings went on for some days, and the festival only ended thirteen days later, when everyone left their houses and spent the day in distant fields or gardens. At Shiraz, the famous town on the plateau, the people all walk from the town to the Tong Gate, above which lies a very sacred Koran, in order to pass under the blessed book. This procession is repeated every new moon, except that which occurs during the mourning month of Moharram. In many districts, on the last Wednesday of the festival, one to six bonfires, *Chahar-shambeh Soory*, are made by each householder, and to obtain good luck throughout the coming year, each member of the family must jump through them, just as people do in Europe at the midsummer St. Jean fires.

• 5 •

TEA, RELIGION, THE RABELAISIAN AND THE INTERNATIONAL

GOING to tea with Persians has one difficulty, the super-sweetness of the drinks and cakes, and one advantage, the loquaciousness of the hosts.

Late one afternoon, I was taken to see an old man, said to be eighty-six years, and an encyclopaedia of the past and present—the kind of person who'd give the right perspective to the newcomer. We left a very foul and narrow alley to go into a spacious and yet more foul courtyard, and up some immaculately clean steps to the first storey. Oh, how dreadful Persian steps are! Nearly always so high that it is rather more like climbing than walking, and the dislike of doing the same thing twice is so great, that no two steps are the same size.

At the top was an enormous room, divided into two by columns painted pseudo-marble. The floor was covered with many carpets, and at one end stood a table surrounded by five chairs. On the table a plate of Persian Turkish delight was encircled by six plates of biscuits. The biscuits, bright yellow with saffron, were also arranged in circles. The

sense of design was evidently strong in the hostess. Persian tea-tables were always carefully and artistically arranged, and, later in the year, when melons appeared at tea, they were served in quarters, the flesh cut into geometrical designs and pink flowers added as part of the scheme: perhaps the prettiest I ever saw was a long narrow dish of small green fruit closely surrounded by a massed line of tight pink rosebuds, and at each end a vase of large yellow roses.

The old man was dressed in European clothes, a Pahlavi cap and an immense watch-chain which might have served to fasten the door at night. He spoke good English, in the fluttering way characteristic of the very old, but was filled with self-respect and pride, for he had travelled in India and been a civil servant for thirty years. Now he had a pension, owned this four-storey town house, which looked as if big enough for fifty people, and a little house and big garden in the country where he grew oranges, lemons, and guavas. Half-way through the meal someone brought in a couple of dishes piled high with orange flowers, not picked from the trees, they assured me, but merely the blossoms that had fallen on the ground. When the feast was over they filled my handkerchief with the intoxicating petals, the remainder being used to prepare orange flower water. He talked volubly of the old days, brought out a volume of photographs to show how people looked when they were allowed to wear Persian clothes; the turban was always ugly, the coats were picturesque, but they were certainly too voluminous and quite unpractical. He was not much upset by the passing of old habits, but he did regret that the price of living had gone up so much, especially during the last three years, and as for sugar, that was now only for millionaires. Opposite us sat one of his daughters, a white-faced woman of twenty-six, who had had eight children and a few miscarriages, perhaps four or six, but only one of the children had died. In her arms, bolt upright, she held the last child, a boy of three months, who grinned gaily in spite of being so small and having such an old wizened face. He was just like the Infant Christ in many early Italian paintings, who, I had always imagined, was made symbolically aged. But I now saw those baby Christs were probably good likenesses, for children in the twelfth century in Italy, and today in Bushire, must have been conceived, born, and lived under similar conditions. The English doctor said it was, judged by local standards, quite a nice baby. It wore a bright pink little cap and several dresses, so short that everybody could see that the mother was the proud parent of a son.

The mother wore a turquoise silk dress (artificial Japanese, of course)

of appalling cut, and over it the indoor *chadar* of thin muslin dyed the fashionable 'red tape' colour. She was very thin but had enormous breasts, which she gave to the baby whenever he cried; she was also partly feeding the twins, aged thirteen months, *and* a child of four. The twins were a boy and a girl, the former quite flourishing, as he got plenty of food, but the girl was only a shadow because the mother, although she wouldn't have minded it dying, was certainly not encouraging it to live. 'What use is another daughter?' said the old man rather petulantly.

When the mother had had enough of the baby it was handed over to her sister, aged twenty, who was not married, because her aged and often ailing parents found her useful as a nurse and her sister found her useful as a nurse-maid. She tossed the baby up and down, constantly kissing it, first on its mouth and then on its pudenda. I wondered if unmarried devoted aunts ever did that kind of thing in the West, but, if so, they certainly didn't do it at tea-time. But we spend a lot of time drawing veils over the primitive and the natural.

It was curious that in Persia, where marriage is so supremely important, the daughter should have been sacrificed in the same way as many English girls, for, in a few years, no one would want her.

The old wife had sent a message that she deeply regretted she was too ill to leave her couch, but curiosity put a stop to her attack of asthma and she left the dark room where she had been sitting, coming slowly up the steps, so completely draped in a white cotton *chadar* that I never saw more than one eye during the long visit, although a great deal of gay laughter escaped from the shroud-like garment. She made fun of her husband because he said he was growing old.

'But I'm sending for a new medicine which will rejuvenate him', said the doctor.

'Then he must get a young wife, for I've had enough of him. I was twenty years younger than he when we married, and he kept me very busy.'

'You shall have some of the medicine too', said the doctor.

'Oh no, that would not be right for a woman', she said gravely.

These people were very superior and had quite clear ideas about what a girl should expect from marriage, so had refused a rich old man who had wanted one of their daughters.

'A girl also has rights in marriage. What use is an old man to her?'

I found satisfactory reasons for refusing the cakes, but the old man said I really must eat some of the Turkish delight, picked up a piece

and put it in my hand. I thanked my stars he hadn't popped it into my mouth, but before I knew it, my other hand contained a piece of cake with a very special meringue on top. Whatever should I do with the stuff? I had no moral scruples about dropping the cake, but it is impossible to allow Turkish delight to fall on nice carpets, so I tossed it up and down as it began to melt in my hand.

Just then, in came the small grand-daughter, bright-eyed and gay, dressed in a minute edition of her mother's 'elegant' frock. She pointed to me with great excitement.

'Oh, that is the lady who came to our school, but then she had a red hat and a little piece stuck out at the side.' Admiring mother and grand-parents all sat in silence while she examined me carefully.

'I like the red hat better than the one you are wearing', and then followed a minute, exact, and careful description of everything I had worn several days before. Persians are excellent observers, and the women take a consuming interest in clothes.

Next came a boy of four, so small, so frail, so pale, but happily conscious of wearing a coat, waistcoat and trousers which were a replica of papa's; the collar came round the top of his ears, the bottom of the trousers round his ankles; he was pathetic and he was funny, but they were all thrilled by the turn-out, so I said '*Inshallah*', to protect him from the evil eye, before I proceeded to admire him and his clothes. That bright-eyed grand-daughter having spotted the Turkish delight, which had reached a state of quite uncontrollable semi-liquefaction, I decided it was certainly time to leave.

There had been a little blessed rain that afternoon, so I washed my hand in a puddle before the next call.

What a contrast! A very tidy, clean courtyard, tidy rooms, a tidy servant, no women, and three learned, serious men. I sat on one side of the room, they on the other, and had to admire a carpet made of silk, costing a great deal but hideous with innumerable flowers of that particular acrid pink made at Kerman. But plenty of people in Persia, Germany and the United States think that type is beautiful.

The men were doctors and Sayids, a very paying combination I judged from the expensive carpet, the splendid gramophone and the whole silver ingot used to make each tea-glass holder. They belonged to a family that had been doctors for generations and were qualified for their job by heredity and not by the usual academic training, but they were men of ability and knew how to wield the hypodermic needle as well as anyone who had returned from Europe with the combined

knowledge of London, Berlin and Vienna. Their old father of one hundred still took an interest in chemistry, astrology and physics.

Apart from medicine, their chief interests were education and religion, as they belonged to that reformed division of Islam called the Usuli, not to the ignorant Akhbari, who, they said, 'were like empty-minded children, incapable of thinking and analyzing, ready to listen to all manner of fantastic tales, that devils live in wells, that snakes hide in bushes and come out as *jinn*. These are the people who have the dead embalmed and sent to holy Kerbella.' The bodies are treated with camphor and other chemicals and put on shelves to dry for six months; when a doctor says they are fit to travel they go as deck cargo by boat to Basra (Iraq), by train to Baghdad and thence by caravan to Kerbella; but the Government very much discourages this export, and soon it will be entirely stopped.

The Usuli (the bosom of religion) is a reformed sect started by the philosopher Sheik Sadruddin, also called Mullah Saddrah of Shiraz, who had said men might drink in moderation, but he especially taught that religion must alter as time went on, for, unlike the Sunni, they understood progress, change, evolution. 'The Shias and the Christians might be reconciled, but never a Sunni and a Shia', said the doctor fiercely, and added, 'Saddrah taught real values, that the worth of a man is in his brain, not his size or looks, and in that brain God puts genius. Education can teach, but it cannot produce leaders of men. That is God's rare gift.'

The three men were all deeply excited about religion because they believed that the right point of view would alter the development of Persia. It was the wrong belief that prevented the education of girls, that made it possible for many towns to have good schools for boys whilst the girls were badly educated. These enlightened men thought that only 5 per cent. of the Bushire women ever read a paper or thought of anything outside their homes. They would have liked the boys and girls to know one another, but the ancient beliefs of the old people were holding the nation back. 'If only we could get back to pre-Islamic freedom all might be well, but the *chadar* is a prison which confines both men and women, although only the women wear it. The Koran had said, "A woman must cover up her jewels", but it was a degenerate interpretation, nothing less than bigotry, that gave her a veil for her eyes, another for her chin and finally covered her completely. We must keep the Koran, but we must get rid of stupid explanations. Mahomet had never said a man might not see his future wife, but many had been

so critical, so difficult to please, so changeable, that men had been compelled to receive a wife as a pig in a poke. Mostly it is only the low people who beat their wives, and often the police interfere.' But I wondered how the police could do much to help people who lived behind such high walls.

In Persia large families were usual and not expensive, they said, a child costing one-tenth of what it did in Europe, and perhaps, they thought, it might be better for Nature to take her course, producing the stupid and the clever. 'Men of the same family may be doctors and street sweepers; there is no need for them all to be in exalted positions—just as the foot is no more important than the eye, so a lawyer is no more important than a fisherman, for Persia has room for all kinds of men. We have a Shah ruling over what you see is democracy. You call your country a democracy, but you are really snobs. In Tehran people do regulate their families, for people see that women are worn out by an annual child, so, for her sake, a few contraceptives are used when she becomes exhausted. Others have few children and put them in a better position. Some have ceased to be real philosophers and have accepted European ideas—perhaps it is good, perhaps it is bad. But Persia is changing: only during the last six years have we awakened to national consciousness—before that we were Persian only in name, now we know we have had a glorious past, and once again we want to be leaders of thought as in the time of Zoroaster, as in the days of the Sassanians. In fifty years we hope to take our place among the great nations, not because of the size of the country, but because of the quality of the people.'

Months later, I attended a tea at which the father of the family was a poet, a politician and a great admirer of Rumi. He quoted the 'Master' to show that thirteenth-century Persia had had many of the ideals which are advanced even today. This story of his might have been the motto of a successful League of Nations: 'Three poor men were travelling in a desert when they met a rich man who gave them a piece of silver money. What should they buy with it?

'The Arab said, "I want Enab".

'The Turk said, "I want Uzum".

'The Persian said, "I want Angoor".

'And they all began an argument which ended in a fight. Just as blood was beginning to be shed a dervish came by and asked the cause of the quarrel. They explained that each wanted something different with the piece of silver.

‘“Oh fools”, said the dervish. “You all want the same thing, grapes, but because you belong to different nations and speak different languages you have forgotten that you are brothers with a common desire”.’

This family deplored the excessive nationalism which was taking possession of Persia and so many other countries. When their country succeeded in escaping from this curse they believed she would once more be the mother of great men. But, at the moment, no one can express such ideas in public.

I had drunk four glasses of tea, refused sherbet after sherbet because the water was doubtful, and cakes because of the flies. I was tired and hungry, so rose to go. The head of the family spoke.

‘As long as you are in this city, please consider yourself our guest, and as long as you are in Persia, think of yourself as the guest of Persia.’

It was a comforting speech, and, on the whole, it represented what happened throughout my stay. The governors of most of the towns I visited did everything possible to help me to see, and something to help me to understand. If some of them had only realized that most English people do not wish to despise their intelligence or kick their bottoms, life in Persia would have been yet more pleasant and easy. If so many people had not feared to visit me because they might have been accused of a too great sympathy for a once-upon-a-time enemy country, I could have gone deeper below the surface. This chewing the rag of past defeats is a wretched business. If the Persian authorities had not held up my post, both letters and papers that came and letters that went, I would be in Persia today.

When I reached the next city, Shiraz, the feeling in March 1933 was so anti-foreign that I was inclined to leave Persia for a country which was more sensible. During the year the anti-foreign sentiment was greatly modified, but, even in Tehran at the end of October, a large tea and dinner were arranged for me by Persians and then cancelled because of this feeling. In the capital there was great fear of spies in the employ of Russia—foreign females arrived, made the Persians drunk and extracted their secrets.

Very dangerous! So all foreign women were suspect.

FROM BUSHIRE TO SHIRAZ

MY visit to Bushire ended only too soon, and the day came for starting off on the journey that separated the colony of Bushire from the Persian plateau, where stand Shiraz, Ispahan, and all the cities known to Europe for their loveliness, their romance, their arts and crafts. It is said to be one of the most spectacular journeys in the world. It is only 180 miles, but the record is nine hours, and that was astonishing. Some thought a driver who took such risks ought to be dead, others that he must be a hero. It was this man who drove a friend, me, a mechanic and luggage over the distance in eleven and a half hours, and that was too fast. A marvellous journey and thrills, if you want them, sometimes every ten minutes. The thrills are beauty and the risk of sudden death from guns, or from falls; and the kind of bump that wounds one end of you on the seat and the other on the roof.

We were up and ready to start at four; there were poached eggs for breakfast, looking unpleasantly slithery and anaemic at 3.30 a.m. The coffee, like most in Persia, was beastly at that hour; it was very annoying that the Shah wanted everyone to live on the country.

The mechanic arrived late with the unpleasant news that we would not be allowed to pass the first *amnieh* (road guard) post till at least 6.30, for as the tribes had 'shot up' a lorry two days ago the journey was considered too adventurous, so the authorities insisted that we should wait till near dawn. As a female, I was not supposed to know anything about this, but at that time in the day people's minds are simply transparent.

Bushire is on a long flat peninsula which juts out into the east side of the Persian Gulf. It has plenty of sand, little water, few trees, about 25,000 inhabitants, Persians and others—nobody knows the numbers exactly—about thirty Europeans and a climate that, in hot weather, has few rivals on this earth. For months, nobody is quite sure whether they are solid or fluid.

Bushire might almost be called an island because for a large part of the year it is separated from the mainland by nine miles of brackish mud, the Masheelah, an accumulation of water from the land combined with the soaking of the high tides; hence it is especially bad in spring and autumn. Over this really fearsome place there passes a raised road, made by the British during their occupation of southern Persia. In dry

weather there are numerous tracks, but there is not one which is not full of pot-holes and ruts. Sometimes an impatient driver thinks he will take a short cut, away from the causeway, and then sometimes he stays in a patch of soft mud for twenty-four hours or more. The camel and donkey caravans can take many tracks which do not make safe going for the motorist.

For a short distance we went smartly along a real road, then by tracks to the Masheelah, where the view across the flat land to the mountains and a promise of dawn was beautiful. The first camel caravan, the animals outlined against a yellow sky, was picturesque, their characteristic movement giving the semblance of a rhythmical undulation to the whole world, but seen near, camels are not picturesque. 'Camels' are one of the delusions about the East that die so hard that perhaps it will last till the last camel. I cannot imagine why anyone should want to look at a camel when they can see a horse.

We were stopped at the first *amnieh* post to have our passports and the car licence examined. It was a dilapidated mud construction bossed by a man who managed to look officious in spite of being shabby. It was horribly cold and depressing, and more so when the driver found he had brought just the one wrong piece of paper out of a hundred which the authorities had provided.

'We're mad to go—everything is against us', he said, but his pride made him decide to get round that officious tramp and after half an hour we were off, leaving behind a melancholy group of donkeys and peasants who were having a pow-wow about sugar.

Everyone who now buys sugar in Persia has to have a little paper stating the amount, day bought, and the name of the merchant, or when leaving a town, he may be considered yet another member of that multitude who live by smuggling. It was the time of No-Ruz, the thirteen-day-long New Year holiday, when nobody is business-like and very few are at home, so these peasants had the sugar but did not have the necessary papers. According to the law, the sugar could not leave Bushire; the guard was adamant about that, but the peasants like sugar and did not mean to part with it. The guard was, however, ready to compromise over a little tip, but the difficulty was to settle the amount. They had already discussed it for two hours, but the driver, who knows Persia in and out, thought one could safely bet it would take five more hours to decide, and then the tip would be excessively small. Every country has its own amusements.

Over the mud and bumps we sped. Fortunately I had my feet on a

spare petrol tin and was able to use it as a sort of stirrup on which to rise when the bumps were too bad. Never before had I realized that riding might be useful to a motorist. Here and there on the mud, patches of green plants were growing, the beginning of a few weeks of rich verdure, which would feed thousands of gazelles. Once there had been fine sport here and a happy change from lamby-mutton or muttoney-lamb, but now, in his efforts to disarm the country, the Shah allows no one in this part of Persia to have a gun or ammunition. The gazelles are charming little creatures, fawn-coloured with a few deeper brown spots, which sometimes get mixed up with the flocks and so are caught, to become a dinner, a very picturesque addition to a garden, or a pet. Once in a hotel lounge I saw a very solid, well-fed Persian officer, his belt almost audibly groaning from the stress and strain of dinner, holding by a chain a lovely little gazelle that looked a fairy thing. There was a Persian beauty and the beast!

Here and there, for some unknown reason, we were ordered to leave the causeway and shoot over the rough land. Now we began to see the *amnieh*, the blue-coated special road guard which makes the way, if not safe, at least safer, for travellers and traffic. It was impossible to suppose that two solitary men could do much against an organized crowd of tribesmen, so although they did not make us feel safe they at least made us laugh. A sharp look-out was kept for odd men and beasts, for any of them might turn into villains—and yet not really villains, for apparently they didn't want to kill, but just hold up cars so that they could get what they needed most, tea, sugar, money and cotton goods. Sometimes they killed, by accident; the person in the most danger being the driver, as, if he was hit, the car would be sure to stop, sooner or later. Usually they did not take English clothes, as they were not fashionable in the hills, but, on one occasion they did strip a man, leaving him with their very inferior boots as the way was stony, and with a straw hat because the sun was extra hot. He reached home without a sunstroke or a shred of modesty.

Would the tribesmen be by the Ahmedi bridge, which the English made with so much effort and which the Persians are allowing to fall so badly into disrepair? It is probably not wise to take anything heavier than the baby in the perambulator over it. The bridge is rather a convenient place for tribesmen to hide, so a special little tower has been built for the *amnieh* where they can be comfortable while on watch; unfortunately, the tribesmen are such early birds that the soldiers' alarm clocks have not always gone off before the raid began.

The car was now going along a recognizable road in a fertile land where there were a great many villages. There were no visible boundaries, no fences, but miles and miles of brilliant-green barley and wheat. Rain had fallen in plenty, and although, for March, the weather was not warm enough, the cereals were hastening to their end, some to be cut as green fodder, and the remainder when the grain was ripe and yellow. The villages were beyond-words dilapidated, the mud walls fallen and broken, the people thin, and dressed in what were once rags and were now shreds. Each village had a specially large enclosure, the house and compound of the Khan; but in a number of cases this was uninhabited or in ruins, for the Shah, in his efforts to make Persia safe for Persians, has had to deal firmly, even harshly, with these leaders who belong to times of warfare, and cannot or will not adjust themselves to times of peace.

The mountains ahead of us were lovely, the barley gaiety itself, but man was sad.

Here and there we passed camels grazing, feeding up whilst they could, in preparation for the lean, dry summer months. Ugly, dirty, smelly creatures they were, but the new-born were fascinating, like all young creatures, and they had a solemn dignity that is generally denied to youth.

We passed near the house of Wilhelm Wassmuss, a very exceptional German consul who made history during the War. Wassmuss was a large, good-looking man of attractive personality who spoke Persian like a native. Early in the Great War, supplied with plenty of money for bribes, he found his way into southern Persia, and by a combination of money and personal magnetism, united a number of the southern tribes against the British. He dressed like a native to give them a greater sense of his oneness with them, and, when they showed signs of weakening in their anti-British feelings, even married the daughter of the chief Ahram. His influence was so strong that a large area in the war maps of those days was named 'Territory Wassmuss'. Once when in a tight corner, he fixed a pole to the top of his tent-pole and said he was receiving wireless messages from the Kaiser. He was quite capable of saying he had even communicated with God. An English soldier wrote of him, 'Wassmuss, alone, powerless, except for his own personality, cut off from support, managed to lock up the equivalent of an Indian division at a most critical stage of the Great War, by a combination of courage, insight and bluff.'

England finally put £50,000 on his head, but no one gave him up,

as that, to the Persian tribesman, would have been an act worthy of torture and of death.

Wasmuss was wounded and later captured by the British, who put him on parole. When he was getting well, he frankly took back his *parole d'honneur*, and, pretending his horse was ill, finally made his escape. His detractors say that he did not withdraw his parole.

Wasmuss was again captured near Tehran at the end of 1918 and treated in a way which does not fit into the best British tradition. Certainly he had been cruel to a number of British prisoners, but in Persia, there ought to be no 'human failings' in our public deeds. A soldier who fought against him quoted a French saying, 'Some are born to receive decorations, others to deserve them'.

Wasmuss went back to Germany, but, finding that the disturbed country was in no position to reward him adequately, returned to Persia to take up agriculture. He was persistent but unpractical and pig-headed, a genius struggling with the mentality of a peasant. There are amusing tales of how he bought heavy agricultural machines from Germany which were quite unsuitable for Persian conditions and tried to drive them over the Masheelah, when everyone warned him that they would sink into the ground. But although it took several days to drag one machine out, he promptly repeated the experiment with several others.

He built a house where he and his musical wife lived, isolated and struggling; he working in the fields, she doing house-work and playing Schubert, to the delight of the musical people of Bushire.

Wasmuss's personality had a striking effect upon everyone he met, so that, even today, his name arouses controversy, his war-time enemies being divided into admirers and vituperators.

Forty miles from Bushire we reached Korasqhun, a land where people are rich, not because they produce the necessities of life, but because they have water, warmth and the special soil that grows the strong tobacco used for the local hubble-bubble or *kalyon* which is smoked by men and women, quite regardless of whether they ought to be working or not. Bullocks, in pairs, were busy dragging water out of deep wells (*chagh*) by cleverly-adjusted, cleverly-balanced skins. Many miles the animals and their masters walk each day that water may bring productivity. The water gurgles down the little ditches between the fields, between the rows, so that the tobacco, even in this dry land, may be green and luscious.

Another *amnieh* post demanded our passports—how tired we were

of this formality by the end of the day! As some of the officials could not even read, the driver had to tell them all about us. Those who could, wrote down our names and presumably somebody, in some city, made nice documents about our comings and goings. There were occasions that day when the unimportance of being a woman had value, for some of the officers simply didn't bother about my name and identity or that of my great-grandfather. I was only a woman—what did it matter?

We were approaching the mountains and passed the villages, Radbar and Daliki, where thousands of date trees grow, tall, strong, producing big crops of a specially fine flavour due to sulphur in the water. There is a strong smell of sulphur, and sulphur is deposited on the floor of the little streams.

At last the mountains were reached and we started for our journey over six passes, the highest 9500 feet, in order to reach our destination, Shiraz, at 5200 feet.

The first pass is Filli-Filli; it has hairpin turns of course and bad surfaces, fallen earth and rocks. It was impossible to think we could have passed a car in many places. We had a marvellous driver; temperamental and artistic, he had a way of spinning the wheel round at bends that reminded me of Paderewski playing. I know I ought to have been scared, but I wasn't. We had super-size tyres, all new. The car literally froze to the road and it really would have been absurd to have an accident with such a clever driver. The other man in the car did suffer considerably, but he knew nothing of cars and their safety when well managed. We passed some bones of dead donkeys and camels, and we passed a donkey that someone might have had the decency to kill—the carrion crows and vultures hovering near. I should hate to die with the undertaker sitting just outside my door. This habit of not killing dying animals is brutal. I remembered an injured cat in rural England, a wounded horse in the Russian Caucasus. There are lurid accounts of the gorges being heaped with the remnants of dead animals and cars that have fallen over, but even bits of the latter are so precious that everything possible is salvaged, so only bleached bones are left to harrow the traveller. But they are everywhere in Persia, even by the side of the streets in fair-sized towns, for whilst the birds clean away the flesh, the dry air preserves the bones.

In the distance the mountains looked grand and magnificent, but near they were almost delicate and covered from valley to summit with a lovely flower, a small lavender-coloured mustard which made a

misty bloom over the bigness, the roughness, the vastness. It is called Shabbaz, 'Come-out-at-night', for it is only after nightfall that its exquisite perfume makes darkness as lovely as its colour has made day charming. In places masses of red anemones grew among the lavender flowers. These alpine gardens were an almost unbelievable, unrealizable miracle to people used to drought and brownness. No European fresh from lands where water is abundant and the sun gentle could possibly realize how we held our breath and almost dreaded passing on. A few weeks earlier the earth had been hard and brown at Bushire, in yet another few weeks it would be still more hard and more brown. Even in the mountains spring smiled for a moment only, and flew away quickly.

The road was almost empty, for business is so bad that camels and donkeys rest and camel- and donkey-men know more of hunger and anxiety than of work and worry. Because, too, of the magnificent drive against brigandage, the technique of caravan travel has altered; the caravans no longer move on all night but are compelled to rest, and rest near the *amnieh* soldiers, who guard them and send them off at the right time in the morning, but a little poorer, for the Government does not pay the soldiers too well, so that a little compulsory donation from the drivers comes in useful.

The only merchandise of any importance going up inland were tins of petrol, nearly all carried on camels; four tins of four gallons each are put together in a light wooden frame, and each camel carries four. It is a curious sight to see, here and there, hundreds of these cases standing side by side, no man or animal visible. There is no hurry when business is so slack, and, as food is dear, it is just as well for the animals to feed where there happens to be grass or any edible plant.

We passed Valerian's bridge, that led men over the river but to an apparently quite impracticable climb. It was difficult to think of Rome here in Persia, but that thought and the knowledge that a Persian king had conquered a Roman emperor, is a great inspiration to budding nationalists. One day, when lunching with a young Persian, who had been talking of the past and future greatness of his country, he leaned over his huge dish of rice, tears came into his eyes, as he said in an impassioned voice—'Oh, if only I could see, see with my own eyes, a Persian Shah with his foot upon a conquered Roman. Why do I have to live in these days when we are nobodies? I am young, but I fear I shall not live till we are conquerors again.'

The first pass, Filli-Filli, was no sooner ended than we began the

Mahloo, named after a mountain about which the road twists and turns mile after mile. I began to think we would never see the end of that mountain.

This road from Bushire to Shiraz, which was made during the Great War, whilst the English occupied southern Persia, is imperfect, but a fine piece of work, being the first real road to connect the Gulf with the plateau. Pliny wrote of Bushire, 'Where the mountains are ascended by a steep flight of stairs'; it sounds fanciful but when you see the old mule track you know this description is, in places, the plain simple truth. It is difficult to realize that men could ever have had the patience to make their way up and down such places. The journey used to take from ten to seventeen days by ordinary caravan, but now it is a good day's journey in a car and a two days' journey, with good luck, in a lorry. There is only one ugly place along the 180 miles, that is where the English put up a notice that they had made a road and some Persian has pulled it down. Of course the English made this road as part of the business of owning an efficient army, but that does not make the road less useful, now that Persia owns all her own country. The foreigner has gone, and even the 'spheres of influence' are of the past. Backwards and forwards armies have made their way across the land, leaving marks good and bad, but Persia is what she is today because of both. Anger and incrimination should have no place in history. The centuries create and destroy, and countries grow. If the time has come for Persia to take its fate into its own hands, so much the better, but, even with deliberate, conscientious, idealistic planning, a country may commit as many follies as the most brutal and powerful of enemies.

The Mahloo pass has some fine views as long as you are wise enough not to pay less attention to the corkscrew than to the hairpin turns. A simple turn is impossible for lorries, and it is on account of the constant anxiety that so many of the drivers become regular opium smokers. There are tea-houses by the way, whose primary use is the sale of opium. The men do not usually become drugged, but just take enough to steady their nerves. The foreigner often gets much upset at this habit. Some accidents, especially at night, are certainly due to a little pleasant opium sleepiness.

There have been an enormous number of accidents. Such little tales as, 'That is where Ali's car went over ten days ago; he was entirely burnt except his feet', need some digesting.

At the end of this pass we reached the great fertile plain of Khuaar Takhteh, its width and flatness giving an extraordinary sense of peace

after the tortuous road. Here the flowers were overpoweringly bright after the dust and glare. Numerous donkeys, part of a caravan, were dancing about in one patch of green stuff, literally drunk with such excess of sweetness; they nibbled off a bit here, gave a kick, dashed off and had a bit a little further on. It was quite clear what the paradise of a Bushire donkey would be.

Not far from here an Englishman, Cox, was killed by the villagers, about 1925, and most Europeans sympathized with the murderers. Cox, who was engaged in business, frequently motored along the road, frequently had trouble with his car and each time sent to the nearest village demanding help. Time after time the peasants came and helped him in spite of his bullying methods and the fact that he never gave them anything. He had a very bad temper, and one day when, after a particularly hard job, the people asked him for money, he, in annoyance, hit a man and the man fell down dead. The relations of the dead man said they must be revenged and shot Cox dead. There in the mountains he lies, unnecessarily alone, it seems, because no one has a good word for him. The man Cox killed was found to be in such a condition that Cox was no real factor in his death, nevertheless people felt that justice had been meted out to Cox for his meanness and his ingratitude.

Next we started off on the Rohdak pass, and were glad when it was over, for a mistake here doesn't merely mean an accident but certain death for all. Once we went backwards a little way and wild dashes had to be made to find stones to stop our backward progress. The driver said he didn't mind, but I had an idea the brown skin of the mechanic looked faded. Perhaps I was wrong. The other passenger said, quite firmly, that he intended to walk that part of the journey on his return.

Again we reached a plain, the Kamarij, again peace, green stuff growing, villages and more flowers. This alternation of desert and fertile plain is characteristic of Persia, but there are times when the desert is so overpowering that one wonders why Persians don't all migrate. Next up the Tang-i-Turcan pass with lovely views, great masses of sloping hills, so smooth that it seemed as if they had been made like that just for fun, and down we go to the biggest plain of all, Kazerun, with its town and blue-tiled mosque, the earth almost rank with vegetation and vibrating with history, for here the city of Shapur stood, here mounds still show how crowded the plain had been, and, in a near valley, are some enormous sculptures of Shapur, of Bahram I and Bah-

ram II, those Sassanian kings who reigned about 400 A.D. At some distance south of Kazerun is a Sumerian carving of 3000 B.C. This land of Persia has had civilized men for so long, that it is almost impossible for us younger races to realize the strength and depth of the traditions that enter into every detail of life. Travellers should, if possible, stop at Kazerun and go up into the adjacent valleys to see the carvings. That means bringing bedding, a servant and stopping in a room at the local caravanserai, which, in spite of lurid tales, can be made quite clean. Many travellers multiply even one insect a hundredfold. All the time I was in Persia I never saw a bed bug, even in very small tea-houses, and the one flea which worried me was caught in a Tehran *droscha*.

The Kazerun valley is very hot and produces an enormous amount of opium. As we passed the peasants were squatting in the fields, busy weeding the young plants, not throwing the weeds away, but collecting them, to be dried for fodder.

There we stopped for lunch at a little tea-house. Lunch consisted of huge slabs of Persian bread which were wrapped round chickens, salad and fried fish. We were not hungry, but very thirsty. The men drank some very precious beer: I only looked on, for it was so difficult to procure that I felt it would be a sin to drink it when it was, to me, just beer and not nectar. We sat on benches near a little stream and under trees which had just begun to show a few leaves. The water was pleasantly clear, but hardly a place in which to wash the tea-glasses.

Mountains were all about us, but in them was no peace, for they belonged to the Quashgai, that tribe which is Turkish in origin and still uses Turkish in private life and Persian in the world. Fighting and ruse, tricks and counter-tricks, were used on both sides, but the future is with law and order. Some Europeans have a romantic sympathy for the free tribesmen, but a safe journey with a chance to admire the scenery and eat in peace is a great deal more really romantic than a severed artery and a foodless night in the tender shelter of hard rocks.

It was not far from there that, some years ago, a car came along with a driver, a clergyman and two women missionaries, one a doctor. The tribesmen, in an attack of playfulness, it is said, hit the arm of the chauffeur and another bullet passed across the back seat, wounding the woman doctor severely and giving a small cut to one of the others. The woman doctor gave directions how she and the chauffeur should be bound up, the clergyman, who had never driven before, took charge of the car, and they all arrived safely at Shiraz.

As we left the plain, we saw the old carving of Pul-i-at-Giveh, but

could not stop for we had many miles to go, and there was danger in the dark. Ahead of us lay Perishan lake, full of little fish with masses of sharp bones, which are dried and sent to Shiraz as luxuries. Travelling does make one sit up and wonder about values. Would we Europeans ever be able to see those fish in the same light as the people of Shiraz? As we mounted the hills the lake looked refreshingly blue and clean.

From now onwards we saw no more flowers, for we were so high that we had returned to winter. There was grandeur, but loveliness had passed away. We mounted the Dokhta or Maiden pass—was it so called after the daughter of the Great Shapur, for in Sassanian days women had power and did not go veiled? In those times Persian women could be strong and bold. We passed the biggest span of telephone wire in the world, put up by the British. We and the wire were in the valley together, turn after turn the car made, and finally we met the wire on the high mountain. That is modern romance, a great deal better than disorderly tribes and smelly camels.

For the first time we reached a valley with trees, Dasht-i-Bahn, mountains with trees and spring water which was clean and cold, a sure friend. You have to be far from England to know what that means! Water, which is such a friend to us at home, is generally a possible enemy in Persia.

It was good to see the trees and yet a tragedy, for the valley is being rapidly denuded to produce charcoal; such things happened in England too. Not far from me today there is no Forest of Feckenham because men destroyed it to boil down the brine of Droitwich.

There were many donkeys on the road, loaded with the precious black bits. The men make a fire in the heart of a tree; perhaps it dies, perhaps parts of it go on growing, but not a single tree is replaced. With a few tiny pieces of charcoal the people cook rice and their bread; they are not wasteful, but they have no thought for the future. Fortunately here and there in Persia there are conservative efforts to stay the killing and plant. At Shiraz the Government had to make a law to prevent the people using all the apricot trees for charcoal! There are a few men who recognise that treeless hills are easily denuded and ultimately produce barren valleys. The remains of some old buildings suggest that many of the now stark naked mountains were once covered with big trees.

The day was drawing to an end as we started on the last pass, the Dasht-i-Arjan, the Mother or Old Woman. It used to be said that anyone who started young on the Dochta pass would certainly be old by the time they reached the Dasht-i-Arjan. To many travellers this is the

most trying pass, so long, so many curves. Each one seems to be the last, but still there is another ahead.

The views were lovely; backwards there was the green Kazerun valley, the blue Perishan lake, and across range after range could be seen the far, hot Bushire which we had left at dawn.

There are a number of caravanserais on the road, nearly all now used as military posts. Some are architecturally fine, made by that genius, Shah Abbas, who could study a fine miniature painting in the morning, finger delicately a lovely piece of velvet made on his own looms, then turn, practical and business-like, to planning safe routes for caravans, comfortable quarters for men and beasts at night. The caravan tracks were not merely locally useful, for Persia was on the way between China, India, and Europe. If Persia could not protect men and beasts she lost great sums of money, in transit and lodging fees, from the vast numbers who passed, both backwards and forwards.

Most of the passenger traffic is now so quick that the change of function from inn to military station is quite sensible, safety being the primary need.

At last the passes were over and we reached the Karajitch river, not deep, but a beautiful colour, a river of fine fresh water that brings comfort and fertility.

We passed through villages, some miserable troglodyte warrens, past stations that yet again demanded passports. We were worried, for the sun was getting low, and it was said that no car could enter Shiraz after dark.

As the sun dropped lower it became very cold, but there was no time to stop to put up the hood. The mountains were beautiful, so beautiful that we almost forgot our anxiety. One mountain was glowing red, the snow was blue, but the car jumped about the road like a shuttlecock, for the steering had gone wrong. On we hurried, reaching Shiraz in time. At last the car slowed down, at last we could really admire the splendid colours which are the glory of the Persian plateau, for we knew we would soon have a supper and bed.

SHIRAZ THE BEAUTIFUL

Even the stranger forgets his home and becomes its willing thrall

SA'DI.

EVERY word you have ever read, in prose, in poetry, every line you have ever seen in pictures, is true, all true.

This lovely city lies in a fertile plain, surrounded by desolate mountains which change and change continuously in a series of exquisite cadences from dawn to sunset. The mountains are near the city in the morning, move away at noon and at night come back as if to enclose and protect their child.

As we entered the town at sunset the driver turned and asked, 'What do you think of it?' I hesitated, not knowing what to answer, and gave it up as hopeless. The mountains to the left, lighted by the sun, were brilliant purples, blues and reds, hard like metal or glass or Persian tiles; near the road cypresses and pines stood in friendly pairs looking over huge mud walls. Mud walls! It was laughable that those tall flat surfaces, which had, for a few moments, stolen all the light and warmth of the sun, could be called by such a drab, dull word. Away to the right, the mountains in deep shadow were soft like a woman, a child, a petal of a flower. There were round lines, round shadows, purple bloom, brown hollows that were full of rest.

We passed under an avenue of elms, the young green winged seeds thick on the branches, each turned to an emerald against the blue Persian sky. Probably it was no bluer than the sky in the Gulf, in the Arizona desert, but at that moment it appeared the best in the world. Next came the great new street, 110 feet wide, with a running stream in each gutter. There was no dust, for the street workers, wearing a once-upon-a-time white coat, khaki shorts, khaki puttees, but no shoes, had been busy for hours, filling empty petrol tins from the streams that ran in the gutters, throwing the water on to the loose surface. It took a great deal of labour, but labour is cheap. There were few people about, for it was the eve of the Islamic Sunday, so Shiraz seemed large, quiet,

and dignified. Green trees looked over every wall, each apparently exactly in the right place, until we reached the line of closed shops and the splendid brick walls of the Ark, the Citadel or Governor's palace, built in 1780, at the same time as the famous bazaar.

At each corner it has a round tower ornamented with a geometrical design made by leaving out bricks. This method, used largely in Persia, produces a design which is not hard and staid but almost alive, for it varies with the time of the day, as the shadows which come and go in the hollow spaces change their shape and change their colour; there is a delightful lightness, the design floats on the surface, as if it were immaterial. In a dull country it would lose all its charm, for only an intense sun makes living shadows. The same type of design is especially beautiful at Kerman, at Veramin, and, on the Tomb Tower at Rayi, near Tehran, great use is made of shadows to give an effect of movement. Over the main entrance, very gay against the sand-coloured walls, is a huge porcelain picture of Rustam, the famous Persian hero and his horse Raksh.

We turned round a splendid chenah tree, which was saved by an Englishman just as the Persians had decided to cut it down to modernise the town! The chenah is a plane tree with a velvety, pale silvery-grey bark. It makes big and little avenues in all the gardens, avenues of trees and, at the same time, avenues of light. On a sunless day the trunks are almost intangible; on a sunny day the bark picks up all the light, at sunset changing into yellow or pink enamel. They give to the gardens as much charm as the cypress and a great deal more delicate beauty. The chenah is loved by all the poets, its leaves being the conquering claws of the lion or the tender fingers of the lover. It occurs in many of the miniature paintings, green in spring, yellow or red in autumn.

Shiraz has the tombs of the famous poets, Sa'di and Hafiz, neither of them really beautiful, but interesting because so many Persians have wished to be buried near these great men, who have had an enormous influence upon the thoughts and conceptions of the Persian people during the last seven hundred years. 'Which of your poets has most modified the life of your people?' asked a Persian, and could not understand that poetry has usually been outside our life. There are those who think the time has come to be careful which poems of Sa'di are given to the young, for he teaches a too ready acceptance of Fate, a too ready submission to events. People still open a volume of Hafiz and trust to a stray line to guide them in conduct and deeds. At the moment, Hafiz

is not as popular as formerly, as there is a growing feeling that the country needs the practical, and that many of his Sufist ideas are dangerously contemplative.

The road mounted up towards the Koran Gate, from which could be seen, away to the left, Kuh-i-banu, the most beautiful mountain near Shiraz, and the old palace of Banghe, the gardens now dilapidated, the fountains dry; but the buildings have been renovated for the use of the officers of the new Persian army, which is daily growing more powerful and efficient. The wireless station at one side, the new barracks at the other, do not add to the beauty, but they too are a part of modern Shiraz. But it is an English firm which has committed the greatest artistic crime in the city, by erecting zinc-covered buildings in the middle of the most famous panorama in Persia—some people say one of the most beautiful in the world. Looking down upon Shiraz, many of the zinc roofs are not ugly, for they are not corrugated, and either the quality of the zinc or the effect of the climate has made them a greeny grey, which, at morning and evening, is really beautiful. But in the future Shiraz will be yet more attractive, for the Shah, in some ways so far-sighted, has ordered Shiraz and other cities to plant trees along the streets. Shiraz has a rose-bush at the foot of each tree, whilst in other cities fire-bush, sunflowers, hollyhocks are planted along the edges of the road, by the gutter, where there is permanent or periodically running water.

The near mountains were high and brown, with many ruins at their base, watch-towers here and there on the summits, for life in Persia has, until quite recently, been very precarious and rarely peaceful. We passed by the fine arcaded brick wall made by Karim Khan Zand to hide his huge garden and his small pleasure pavilion, where he too, a hundred years ago, could look over Shiraz to the mountains, snow-covered part of the year, and to the blue salt lake into which flows the river and the outpourings of the innumerable wells which have been dug along the base of the mountains to make the gardens green. A salt lake is the end of most Persian rivers, few of them ever reaching the sea. The top of the wall, like most others, has a covering of mud, where later in the year there grew masses of a short, bright red poppy which made the whole district gay and charming.

Ahead was the narrow opening in the hills, the Tang Allaho Akbar, through which it was so difficult for an enemy to enter, at which travellers from Ispahan used to cry, 'Allah is most Great', when after days of wilderness, of drought and of danger, they saw ahead of them,

framed by the mountain slopes, the green plain with its hope of repose. At this opening is the gate in whose roof is the precious Koran, written by Hassan, the second Imam, so sacred that if anyone tried to tear away a leaf, presumably to make a talisman, that leaf would at once weigh eight mands (120 lb.), the weight of the whole Koran. Those who are wise pass under that arch at least once a month, that they may be guarded from evil. At the night of the new moon the road is black with people walking, noisy with cars and carriages, all on their way to make the monthly pilgrimage, which is probably a relic of the old Zoroastrian reverence for the heavenly bodies.

Viewed from the Tang Gate, Shiraz should be called the City of Cypresses, for in no other town in Persia do they play so large a part; they are more important here than in Italy, for they are still green and fragrant when late summer has turned Shiraz almost into a desert. Sa'di knew their value—

*'Oh Cypress tree, with purple limbs,
This colour and scent of thine
Have shamed the scent of the myrtle plant
And the bloom of the eglantine.'*

Within the city is the Great Bazaar, also made by Karim Khan, its two long arcades of splendid brick-work intersecting in a magnificent dome. The Khan is a local hero, for, unlike most rulers of his time, in actions as well as in words, he was the servant and not the taskmaster of his people. But underneath this fine architecture are shops with innumerable inferior products of Persian and foreign manufacture, boots made of paper, cotton stuffs of hideous designs and even more hideous workmanship, bad china, bad lamps, bad everything: here and there some of the good craftsmanship lingers, a man making delightful gay coverings for mules, another doing as good silver work as at any period in the history of Persia. Good craftsmen are not dead, but wise buyers are difficult to find. About the bazaar wander peasants trying to sell beautiful old things, an inlaid Mullah chair, pieces of Shah Abbas silk, old earrings; and the antique merchants are there too, buying for the foreigner. Until life is changed, the bazaar cannot be beautiful, for in it are dirt, evil smells, revolting disease, poverty, vice.

The women of Shiraz are poor and often dirty but they do their best to keep clean. Water is scarce in the lovely city, as in nearly every town in Persia, so a special motor bus takes the women two miles outside the city to a stream whose water is both soft and medicinal. They take their

laundry, a brazier in which to burn charcoal, a brass bowl in which to wash the clothes, a teapot and a little food.

Many of the women have no change of clothes, so one by one, they wash their garments, dry them in the sun and put them on again, at the same time having a bath. It is taken for granted that no man comes near this place, so they wash and get washed in complete freedom and confidence.

Here, among the poor women, may still be seen the remnant of the European ballet skirt which Nazir-din-Shah introduced to his harem and other rich women. The rich have long since given up the ridiculous habit, but among the poor the chiffon ballet skirt is represented by an enormously long frill round the waist, perhaps a foot deep, made of anything from muslin to furnishing cretonne.

This wash-place is near the famous tomb of Sa'di, which is very disappointing. I was even shocked that women dried their clothes on the grass of the courtyard and little boys yelled to make echoes in the underground cistern, but probably Sa'di doesn't mind, for he played a tune on every human string, from the sublime to the ridiculous, from the tender to the sadistic, from the refined to the grossly Rabelaisian.

Out beyond Shiraz a rough track leads to a salt lake where wild pigs may still be shot, where most of the year it is impossible to get to the water edge because of great marshes, but the goats are happy, for they don't mind salt food. I think the view of Shiraz from the salt lake is the most beautiful, for from there it is a blue city floating in the air, above a mirage-lake that has a calm, a clarity and a blueness that is inconceivable to the people of the West.

The day comes to an end, and the best of Persia, night, comes on. Perhaps there are more beautiful dawns and sunsets than at Shiraz. Perhaps—but night! When the moon is full everything is clear, the bare mountains glow as if they had been set alight, every leaf, every flower, every stone shines. And when there is no moon the stars come down and play in the pools, dance round the tall cedars and faintly light the tops of the black hills.

But night is not quiet—the dogs bark and howl, the jackals sneak down into the streets to fight, lonely men going their way sing to keep away the *jinn*, and camel and mule caravans begin to move on at dawn, their bells sounding endlessly, music to some, discord to others.

Every hour I looked at the city, its setting, its colour, I could almost have laughed aloud with delight, but when I saw the women's ignor-



A few trees and a little water are almost paradise after hours in the desert.

ance, boredom and worse, the poor in disease and misery, then I could certainly have wept.

But within Shiraz the Beautiful seeds have been planted which will some day make life as good as the city itself.

• 2 •

AT HOTEL SA'DI

I SETTLED down at the principal hotel, which appeared very impressive as it was approached by a long flight of steps which divided in two, curving imposingly to the first floor. It looked as if a building from Touraine had become exhausted on the way to Persia, or as if some Persian architect had been sight-seeing in France and got muddled on the way back. Of course it had to be called Sa'di. He was born in A.D. 1193, but even today is quoted by anybody and everybody.

For Persia, it was really quite a nice hotel; below the stairs there is a billiard table whose green top is still almost emerald and has only enough cuts to make playing a little more exciting. At the top of the grandiose entrance is a 'Dinnin Room', with the prices in Persian, and outside every window is a nice blue enamel label stating the number of beds in each room. All the time I was at the hotel beds were constantly going in and out of the windows, trying, presumably, to make a compromise between the legal schedule and the fluctuating number of guests.

An hour after my arrival the 'Dinnin Room' became the dormitory of nineteen Persian actors and actresses who slept on the floor on quilts. In order that no one might see what was happening inside, the lower parts of the numerous glass doors were whitewashed. I was sorry, because, when coming up the stairs, without any plotting, planning or evil intent, I could not help seeing those elegant Persians at home. The actors were some of the most handsome and smart men I have ever seen, but, before the whitewashing, I had learnt that, in private, they abandoned a tie, a waistcoat and even forgot to do up buttons. In public their shoes were Parisian, one size too small, mirror-like in surface, but quite early in the morning the very best-looking actor wore European shoes with the backs trodden down in which he could go slip-slop, slop, slop along the stone passages; noisy, but comfortable and Persian.

The Sa'di has a garden in front and another behind; the front pond

is round, with innumerable goldfish, and that behind is heart-shaped, with more goldfish. There are little beds ornamented with arabesques of various green plants, designs in stones and gravel, all kept gay by constant relays of plants in pots. Some stones are even silvered with aluminium. My Indian servant brought flowering stocks in pots, both to decorate my room and to conduct a debating match with the smells. I tried to bargain over the price, but it took so long that I decided one might as well buy plants whilst they were still in bloom. The gardener, who had no patience with my impatience, assured me that the geranium would certainly blossom the next year!

I felt I had really reached romantic Persia at the Sa'di with its two ponds, orange trees and cedars, until 8 a.m. on the first morning, when, as I was looking out of the window at as lovely a range of bare mountains as any town-dweller could desire, the actor with the super-Valentino eyes and sub-shadows under them walked down the steps, shoeless, hatless, but carrying several things in his hands. He squatted down by the pond and the goldfish. I foolishly presumed he was about to compose a poem on the delightful reflection of the deep red stocks in the water.

It was awfully nice to think that Persia was so advanced that her handsome young men had false teeth, toothpaste, tooth brushes (two varieties), and that, at least every morning, they washed them in the garden pool. My Persian romance fell in thunder about me, but the goldfish were not depressed nor their rate of mortality excessive. But one young man does not make a morning. There was a whole queue of people who practised oral hygiene. I thought I might be cheered by looking at the interior garden. After one glance, I wondered if it might be better to return immediately to England, for the negro servant was hanging—that was what hurt—*my* laundry on the orange trees and *my* servant was washing *my* early tea set at one side of the heart-shaped pool whilst the waiter was scrubbing his hands and face only a yard away. It was very democratic; Islam is said to be the only religion that comes up to that ideal.

There were two women servants in the hotel who did some of the work that the men didn't. The employment of women is difficult, as no decent woman can be a hotel maid, so these two were worn-out prostitutes, and when they were worn-out maids they would then be qualified to be midwives. That is one way of keeping down the population. One was negroid, coarse, unpleasant, dirty, untidy and always arranging her filthy pink *chadar*. She was in charge of the room opposite mine.

She left her shoes outside the door, thus exposing her horrid feet; and tickled the man-guest to wake him. The other woman had been a beauty, still put henna on her hair and nails, but forgot to wash: one day her stockings dropped down, whereupon she pointed to her pretty legs and patted them with pride. She had coquettish little ways of moving her hands, but after I discovered the condition of her skin I insisted that the Indian should make my bed. The day she first saw my hot-water bottle she nearly died of laughter; her movements indicated that it was some odd sort of egg that I had laid.

I had given instructions to have the glass in the windows and cupboards cleaned. The coquette tried to dust off marks that were years old. I said 'water' in my kindergarten Persian. She smiled charmingly and began to clean by spitting vigorously on an old rag. I said 'much water'; she looked bright and intelligent and produced the slop-pail to clean the glass. I grabbed it furiously and put it in the passage, gave her my basin, adding 'soap' as a further suggestion—she took mine, the very nicest kind at 3s. 6d. a cake. That I rescued too, and finally a little of the glass became translucent. A messenger bringing a letter spat on one of the rugs that covered the floor closely, so I dragged that too into the passage. At the end of two days my room was fairly clean, but I was ready for a rest-cure.

People had their meals in their rooms, in the passages, on the verandah, in the garden. I divided mine between the bedroom and the verandah after I had had a lovely *kalemkar* hung up to hide the washing apparatus, although, unfortunately, lysol has such a noisy way of killing germs that it gave away what the eye could not see.

It is very difficult to order dishes with a small vocabulary, and there is no menu, so when the servant suggested eggs and spinach I agreed. He brought six boiled eggs—it had never struck me to limit the number. However, as I had never eaten six eggs, I thought I would try. I will never try again. An egg in Persian is 'a chicken's egg'. I never discovered if they have anything smaller, but, as those half shells accumulated until there were twelve, even small ones looked a lot. I really did order a dozen oranges, but did not say they were not to be the local marmalade variety; but that was not as bad as the Englishman who told the gardener he wanted a hundred orange trees in his garden, and they all turned out to be sevilles. In Persia every different variety of a fruit has a different name.

One rather cold night, on returning to the hotel, I found two women in black *chadars* just outside my window huddled together over

a pan of charcoal: they were ladies of the street getting warmed before the night's work. The taller of them was very superior and lived in the hotel, but the other only stood at the gate, hoping for a night in the smart Sa'di. When they had done well they had breakfast together on the verandah, and always shared the food with the two maids, all of them using the same cups and the same spoon for honey. Both gave me a salute whenever we met. They had no idea that there were respectable ways for an unattached woman to earn her living. One day I found them and the coquette in my room, busy making a pattern of my lace blouse: they too had the general ambition to be Parisian when the *chadar* was off.

The door locked with a padlock, and from that day I had to take the key when I went out, as the servant's promise 'to guard well' was evidently somewhat inadequate. At night the windows had to be barred, as they led on to the verandah. The bell did not work, even after a fortnight, so, in or out of *déshabillé*, I had to call, but by the end of a few days anyone who heard me make a sound, even odd people who dropped in for tea or wine, guessed the servant was wanted and called him. Shiraz is a city but also a village.

The Sa'di might have been much worse, and was quite cheap, £6 10s. per month for a room, three meals a day and as much laundry as you wanted, done in the heart-shaped pool with false teeth, cooking pots and lousy heads. It looked just like the laundry from the hygienic establishments at home, and, as so many people live in Persia until at least middle age, I began to wonder if we were not just a wee bit fussy.

· 3 ·

AN UNEXPECTED LUNCH

SEEING what people eat is perhaps more interesting, although less exciting, than seeing how they make love, for the former has many varieties and the latter is apt to be uniform from East to West and back again, so I was more than delighted with that first unexpected meal.

I was wandering about a famous garden in Shiraz and came across a small Arabian-Night pavilion divided into two by an open verandah, through which ran a stream in a channel lined with turquoise tiles. That's the way to make water a lovely colour! The ceiling of the verandah was gay with quaint pictures of nicely dressed men armed with pistols and guns, who were riding chubby, long-tailed horses and

shooting curly, well-fed lions which rolled on their backs smiling pleasantly, and marvellous four-eared white hares which ran away from anatomically impossible dogs. Thus was hunting reduced to a gentle pastime. Other pictures showed immense numbers of soldiers landing from such small boats, that they must have been produced on the widow's-cruise-of-oil principle. The corner pictures showed cities which were a précis of all the architectural styles of the whole of Europe and Asia, from Persepolis till the middle of the eighteenth century. The overhanging eaves were also decorated with Chinese-looking ladies and bearded men. To look upwards was to be amused.

I supposed the place was deserted, for there was no sound except the bulbul being gloriously, happily amorous at the top of a pomegranate tree, its notes as red as the fiery blossoms. I was looking, a little entranced, as always, at the splendid purple of the judas tree against the black cypress, when, presto! I was surrounded and captured by five women in gay *chadars*, two negresses, three men and four children. Presto again! There was a bench, a carpet on it, placed by a negress of incalculable antiquity, a table in front of it, covered with a white Europeanized tea cloth, and I was sitting down drinking appallingly strong tea and trying not to look as if taking a dose of quinine. They sat and stood around me, and, with the help of the dictionary, we had a great many words in common, but very little pronunciation. The eldest son, who had just come from school, thought that by getting very near and yelling that I'd understand better, but he, like many Persians in the springtime, had indigestion from eating too much leathery lettuce (*kahu*).

The women, one of them really beautiful, came very near and by a well recognized pantomime, one hand on the stomach and one on the breasts, demanded the number of my offspring. Two sons made me a female reproducing machine worthy of Islamic respect. I learnt to mention them when I wanted a little extra prestige, but it was not until the end of my stay that I realized that life might have been still easier if I had imaginatively increased them to six. Having settled this point, they turned to my clothes, their interest being so great that I feared I'd be undressed. The Persian woman is interested in outside clothes, but she is simply ecstatic in her curiosity about what is hidden. They were most excited by the crochet lace on the blouse, the clox on the stockings and the wonderfully made hem on a tailored skirt. They took off my hat and everyone tried it on. I was a marvellous European toy that had dropped out of nowhere into their midst, and they were going to

get all the fun they could out of it. They stroked my cheeks, possibly to see if the colour came off, looked down the neck of my blouse to see if my back was as white as my face, and down the front to see if that was up to sample. Their amazement and delight was very entertaining. Next they said, with deep sighs, that God had made them black like my bag, me white like the blouse, and that whiteness was beautiful. It seemed rather an exaggerated way of stating our relative colours, but I learned later that the polite rejoinder would have been that things were really quite the other way round and that they were as white as snow, but it takes a lot of Persian to be meticulously polite in a land where the flowery rejoinder is *de rigueur* and so charming that it almost seems truthful.

The tea having disappeared, a negro servant, a descendant of the slaves that, until about twenty years ago, used to come from Zanzibar, brought a cherry sherbet. I took a sip and hoped the typhoid injection worked. Sherbets are made with all kinds of fruit juices, but usually they are much too sweet, for the Persians love sugar.

They asked me to lunch, but I'm sure they had no idea how delighted I was to accept. All but two flew away to reappear with a large leather mat which was placed on the stones, on its top a carpet which the servant swept, covering us with dust which tasted awful, and finally a huge soiled table-cloth. One of the girls asked if I smoked, but had a big whiff herself and then passed it to her companion. About half was left when it reached me, but I had learnt something of local infections so dropped it accidentally. But they picked it up and offered it again, so graciously, so charmingly, that the only thing was to live dangerously and smoke.

Lunch was ready. Under each plate lay an enormous slab of bread; there was a huge dish of bright green *polou*, the colour chiefly due to a herb, a dish of *cholou* (rice), a stew of meat, lentils and potatoes, a bowl of apricots, a pile of dates and flies. At a Persian meal everything appears at once; you don't have to look at the menu—it looks at you.

The negress went to the garden pond, dipped a lump of white curd cheese into the muddy water, gave it a squeeze and brought it for me to eat. Next she did the same with the *kahu*. They all wrapped a piece of cheese in a lettuce leaf and ate it as an *hors-d'œuvre*, saying it was very good. I didn't; I rubbed my tummy instead, hoping they would consider that indicated unsuitability of food. They understood at once.

We all sat down on the edge of the carpet, crossed legs, some having

taken off their shoes to be more comfortable. Everyone ate with their fingers, except a half-negro man and myself. He was a eunuch, left over from the slave days, who had grown rich and was, in spite of his several wives, a terror to the girls of the neighbourhood. It is possible to eat rice almost elegantly with the two first fingers and the thumb, but none of these people had acquired the finished technique. It is said that rice, like a chicken's wing, tastes best in the fingers, but I always remember a tall man with a very long face who, when he had finished his mountainous dish of *cholou*, was so covered with fat that he made the whole tent shine. Everyone curled up a piece of bread to make a sort of spoon in which the stew was taken up, and all were gay, that special kind of Persian gaiety which is as old as time and as young as the passing moment. But it was a messy meal, with each person stretching here and there to get what they wanted, and the women stretching still more, to find choice morsels for those exalted creatures, their sons. The only seriously objectionable thing in Persia is the boy of less than fourteen, who is indeed godlike to himself. How he manages to metamorphose into the delightful young man of eighteen is miraculous.

When the meal was finished a servant came round with a lovely brass jug and basin, a towel and a piece of soap. The water was poured over the hands of each and ran through a perforated cover into the basin. The washing was not perfunctory, but very careful, one woman even producing a nail-brush. Next they all went to the pond, where the gentry washed their mouths and the servants the dishes. A European shudder ran down my back, but I knew they had an Islamic shudder, that my mouth had not been cleaned immediately after the meal.

They carefully watched the way I ate, used my fork and spoon, forgetting, I am sure, no detail. In spite of their persuasions, I really couldn't have a second helping of the *cholou*, which was very nice, for everyone had had their fingers in the dish. They were amused at my objection to flies, and, like the considerate people they are, two of them ran away for fans and did their best to keep away the innumerable creatures which took turns to cover me, the dates and the stewed apricots.

The man of this household had two wives, a regular one with two children and a *sigheh*, or temporary wife, recently taken for a year. She was a bright, intelligent girl of about sixteen, who was going to have a baby in three months. She spoke charming Persian, and her hand moved with exquisite grace as she fanned away the flies, but it was impossible not to feel uncomfortable, for the man had the right, at the end of the

year, to send her away. With luck she might find another husband, and, without luck—there is only one industry for women in Persia.

Only three of the women had the courage to be photographed. It is impossible for us to realize the feelings of indecency that the strict Persian woman has about her face. It is said that some Persian women followed the example of the Russians and bathed without clothes in the Caspian Sea. When strangers came along the beach they covered their faces and were satisfied, and so were some of the strangers.

A few days later, when I brought the prints, two of the women went off immediately to show their photographs to their friends, but the third looked at the picture, tears came into her eyes, she blushed violently and tore it up.

'It is Muharram, and she has become fanatic,' said one scornfully.

After lunch we had tea, of course, and they asked me to come again; but would it be possible to wear another hat and dress? Having covered up their faces, they took me to the waiting *droscha*, for which, to my surprise, they had paid and about which, still more to my surprise, the *droscha* man did not try to cheat.

That was a real Persian meal, but a few nights later I went to a civilized Persian dinner. I drove to a well-known school, where a servant was to meet and conduct me, down the narrow street, to the house of my host. An oil lamp lit us along the passage to the door, across a courtyard where there was a tiny pond and pots of flowers, up steep stone steps and to a long narrow room with a sofa at one end and chairs ranged closely around the sides. On the walls were bad European pictures, and the mantelpiece, instead of having the usual piece of Persian satin decorated with gold or silver laid work, had a frill of European machine-made embroidery. Anything European is considered an advance on things Persian, quite regardless of whether it is good or bad. It is a tiresome stage through which many Persians are passing, but no doubt time will put it right.

The party consisted of three men and their wives, the women dressed in afternoon frocks of voile, lace and satin, quite European, except for the bad cut, but there was a bunchiness about them all which suggested queer and quite unsuitable lingerie. I learned later that it was all very thick, Swiss embroidered and Victorian, even to open drawers! The women were all good-looking, with short marcelled hair and more than enough cosmetics. One of them, a member of the local aristocracy, was really beautiful, exceptionally graceful, charming and intelligent. This was a small group of advanced people, whose women did

not wear the indoor *chadar*, who met men outside the family at private gatherings for talk, music and fox-trotting.

Being an enlightened dinner, it was punctual; we did not eat nuts and sweets for an hour beforehand, nor did we sit on the floor and use our hands. The table had a fresh white cloth, two vases of roses, certainly very faded, but I learned later how difficult it is to keep flowers nice in such a dry climate. Before each person was a high stack of dishes, a large selection of knives and forks and an immense pile of bread. We began with tomato soup, which would have been excellent if one man had not made noises like quarry explosions. But he was a clever and amusing man! The drink was a two-year-old Shiraz wine made by the host from Kholleh grapes. Next came a dish of dark brown prawns. I took a small spoonful, hoping for the best, for I knew they were caught at Bushire, dried in the sun, and the dirt as well. I had smelt them in the bazaar at Bushire and fled, so how must they smell after a two hundred mile journey in an uncovered lorry in broiling heat? However, with salad, they tasted quite good. I felt rather ashamed of my insularity.

The next course was fried sweetbreads with fried mushrooms, really so good that I began to get hungry. There are so many kidneys and sweetbreads in Persia that I've wondered if every animal killed has more than the usual European allowance. But the host certainly meant to satisfy one's hunger, for there came a whole roast chicken with fried potatoes for each person. Potatoes here are queer-looking objects which seem to have gone into mourning, and when fried are hardly distinguishable from stones; but when mashed with goat's or sheep's milk, they are delicious. In each chicken, however, there was a lot of work but not much to eat, as they were small, bony and fleshless. I wondered if they were part of the little flock of birds I had seen that morning in the bazaar, lying flat on the ground, their legs held, in half-dozens, by men of many years who sat in rows at the edge of the road.

The servant, after having removed the plates, which were piled high with chicken skeletons, brought in an immense dish of rice, the long grains all separate and almost fluffy, and another dish with a mixture of bits of lamb and other things, well flavoured and meltingly tender. Nobody knew the English names of the herbs and spices which made this dish characteristic. At this point I learnt that the three women had specially cooked everything themselves, for in the class to which they belonged it was essential that they should be good cooks, good seam-

stresses, and super-excellent makers of fancy work. How many times in my Persian year did I wish that pansies and blue ribbon bows had never been invented.

I had been told I must eat a lot or they'd think I didn't like the dishes, so I was thankful that the pudding now appeared, pieces of sponge cake, always rather solid in Persia, except in Tehran, floating in a mixture of custard and sour cream. The Shiraz dried apricots that came too were very pale and very acid. Finally dessert, oranges and tangerines. There are a great many local oranges, varying in colour from lemon to deep orange, in flavour from the delicious to the utterly boring and in juiciness from liquid to desiccated, each kind having a special Persian name. Throughout dinner there had been a succession of little dishes of walnuts, almonds and pistachios, the latter coming in their shells, after having been heated in the oven with lemon juice and salt; many of them were not very green in colour but had an excellent flavour.

At last we were free to go to the drawing-room, where there was very good Turkish coffee, a *fortissimo* cherry brandy, also made by the host, and music. Two women and one man took turns to play the *tar* whilst someone else beat the drum; the resultant music was here, as at Bushire, not beautiful but so very exciting that I listened contentedly for hours. There is a Persian saying that music is only perfect when there is a *tar*, a drum, a human voice and a dancer. For a short time one man sang, but no one could do real Persian dancing, which is generally confined to improper males and females.

They were very gay and made many jokes about the supposed shocking way that men treated women. They said the professor had had twenty-nine wives and eaten twenty-eight in small bits. I put on an expression of intense horror and dropped my knife and fork as if quite overcome, whereupon they explained, very graciously, that it was a joke—that the old idea of more than one wife was now repugnant to many.

I asked the man on my left how often he beat his wife, but he referred me to her, for, said he, as a result of the great change that has taken place, the women now beat their husbands! In former times, before he was reformed, he used to use women's skins for covering the drums, as no other skin when beaten made such a splendid sound. There was a painful silence whilst they waited to see if I'd know the last statement was a joke. But this man added gravely that he had seen fundamental changes in his lifetime. He was the son of his father's first wife, who had had many beatings; the second wife had had less and the third none!

His old father often said that he was amazed that he could have altered so greatly.

More Turkish coffee came, more cherry brandy, made of the local fruit which the Shirazese are convinced are better than any other cherries in the world, but their brandy was certainly better than any I had ever tasted before. There were plates of *ghez*, a local sweetmeat made at Ispahan of the gum of a plant, sugar and pistachios, very nice unless you have false teeth, for there are few good dentists in Persia.

I had arranged to leave at 10.30, for after a certain hour a solitary woman in an open *droscha* is none too safe on the outskirts of a town, where there is a thin coating of civilized veneer over a core of the primitive and undisciplined. But fear was always forgotten in the beauty of those spring nights in Shiraz, the mountains so near and full of light, the sky so clear, the air so caressing that it might have been the touch of some intangible, invisible and passionate personality.

• 4 •

AN HISTORIC OCCASION

SEEING the actors and talking to some of them every day, made me want to see their show, so I sent for a ticket, but no sooner was it brought than they presented a complimentary seat; later in the week they kindly gave me a second, but when I arrived all the seats were taken, so I was put into a niche at the end of the hall called a box, where the balustrade was broken and the floor covered deep with nut shells and cigarette ends.

The actors had come down from Tehran as a temporary touring company, doing a mixed show of dancing, singing, music and acting. Most of the men were handsome, but the women were rather heavy and stodgy; that judgment perhaps gives a wrong impression, for whilst the European and Persian ideas about men are the same, they differ with regard to women, for the Persians haven't any more admiration for the slim woman than we have for the fat. Legs which we consider elephantine some Persians consider worthy of a poem.

The occasion was historic, for it was the first time that women had appeared on the stage at Shiraz, all their parts up to that date having been taken by men. Special permission for this innovation had been obtained, with great difficulty, for Shiraz had passed through a period of controversy with regard to women. At one time there had been an

order that women should walk on one side of the street, men on the other, that no men and women might drive together in a carriage or car unless there was a guarantee that they were married. At the moment, there was freedom, but some of the elders were getting very agitated that so many men, women and bottles of *arak* found their way into the fields at night. It was indeed very agitating, for, covered by her *chadar*, how could any husband be sure that one of these wanderers was not his own wife? The uncertainty almost spoilt his own pleasure when he was out with a lady friend.

There was a story that a young man walking down the wide main street caught sight of a fine pair of eyes beneath a *piché* and set out in pursuit; he invited her to go for a drive with him, enquired where she lived, begged her to go down a small alley where they might be alone. She did as he requested and soon had pulled her *chadar* from her face.

'Whatever are you doing?' asked—his mother!

She was only fourteen years older than he, and brown eyes wear well!

There is another tale that as a man and woman got out of a *droscha*, a pedestrian noticed that she had nice legs. He followed the lady as she went up the street and suggested she should go for a ride with him. To his delight she accepted at once, but when in the privacy of the carriage he asked to see her face, it was that of his wife. Then, of course, the trouble began.

There are a great many pros and cons about the enveloping veil.

The show took place in one of the local cinemas. In front of the ordinary seats were placed a row of French drawing-room chairs on which the great and the very greatest sat. The very greatest was the local head of the army, who had two obsequious attendants who stood and saluted in a very stiff and determined manner the whole time they spoke to him. One of them, his riding whip under his arm, walked up and down in front of the great as if looking for an enemy lurking behind the flower-pots, which were on little tables, or the *kalemkars* which were draped in front of the stage. The Shah's picture was, as usual, in a prominent position.

The men sat on the left, the women on the right, whether the greatest or the cheapest, so the women's side, as everyone wore the black *chadar*, was sombre except for a few children under twelve who wore very gay modern clothes with hats and berets at a correct European angle. All that could be seen of most women was one eye or a piece of a nose, as the top of the faces of the rich was hidden by the *piché*, and that of the poorer by the *rabendeh*, which has a small piece of fine-drawn

thread-work, the Eye of the Nightingale, through which they look, rather mistily, upon the world; a more honest name would be the 'Eye of the Prisoner'. It was very amusing to watch a flirtation in progress across the aisle. It is quite easy for the woman to drop her hand for a moment or more in order to expose her face. She was good-looking, with very beautiful eyebrows, but the man who caused the *chadar* to drop was only eager. Most of the women in the dearer seats wore cotton gloves, and many smoked.

But there was some colour on the men's side, the lovely Normandy blue of the local police, all very military-looking men, the khaki of the army and the many shades of fawn, greys, blues in which the modern Persian dresses. Most of the men kept on their hats, and some held the Islamic rosary in their hands, the beads generally amber-coloured, a few white and one a glorious red. Whilst they talked, whilst they listened, Allah, Allah went their hands, although their minds were far away. In Roman Catholic countries it would be the women who were so busy, but in a country where the average man thinks of heaven as a garden with food, drink and houris, he would naturally not wish to waste any opportunity of accumulating good marks. But some men carry the rosary merely to have something in their hands, and others have very expensive stones as a sign of their financial standing.

All this was very Eastern, but down the aisle walked an ice-cream man in a smart white jacket. I saw the ices being made in a room at the back. There was no temptation to buy one. He also sold tea, to which was added, from little bottles, the special Shiraz lemon juice. But everywhere was that smell, I don't know what, which was to me, till the end of my stay, sickly, unpleasant, almost revolting. After a couple of years in Persia, however, you cease to notice it.

The show began with a solo dance, a European affair with a few Eastern gestures thrown in; the girl was graceful, although too abdominal for our taste, but not charming, for her blue knickers looked as if they might have come from Woolworth's and the skirt had been made from the curtains of Miss Aspidistra's front parlour. How the house did enjoy the very carefully arranged splits. But she had lovely eyes.

The second item was a woman singing to the accompaniment of a piano, the kind that in England is forgotten in the nursery, with the bottom front knocked out, two violins and the *tar*. The first violinist was a clever, delightful player and a most charming man. The singer sat in an arm-chair, behind a table covered with a white tea-cloth, on

which were two pots of flowering stocks. On the floor in front of her were a dozen pots of geraniums. In spite of being dressed in sequins and a pearl head-dress *à la Russe*, she had that temperamental expression which, in Europe, is usually left behind the scenery. She kept it throughout the evening, except those rare moments when she glanced at the first violin as if about to kill him. That probably was because he trained her so severely. Her singing was purely Persian, little lip movement, but much use of her mouth as a resonator. The music, except when very loud, was rather like a Gregorian chant, but when loud seemed to me so raucous and unmusical that I wished I was back in the hotel. However, it was just those moments that brought the house down and made me realize how little I appreciated or understood this Eastern singing. She stood up in recognition of the applause, never smiling, but continuing to hurl that temperamental expression at us as if they'd let us in without paying for our seats. At certain moments there was a primitive intensity and insistence about the music which made it very moving: it was like the inevitability of a storm, the sun rising or a constellation making its way across the sky.

Then followed several plays, selected scenes from Molière and plays written by one of the actors. The acting was excellent, showing strong Russian influence. It was curious, in that cinema in a little Persian town, to feel one was back in the Arts Theatre at Moscow. There was laughter at old men's animosity and cupidity, there was rejoicing when a woman kissed the man she loved and not the one who had bought her, there were jibes at the *chadar*. A recurrent and much-loved joke was:

'So you are a father once again.'

'Yes; unfortunately it is one's duty to sleep with one's wife sometimes.'

The man who wrote the plays wanted a changed Persia.

The actors were an intelligent group of men, who were keen about their profession, although, as yet, acting is much looked down upon in Persia. But they had hope of a great future as the country became more enlightened.

The singer was said to have one of the most splendid voices in the city, and she was only at the beginning of her career, but she needed careful training, which was a little difficult, as she could not read either words or music, and so had to be taught both. She had been married at twelve, but because she persisted in having singing lessons her old-fashioned husband had divorced her, and she had recently married a man for love. Her dour face lighted up. 'I have had to leave him in

Tehran, but in a few weeks I'll be with him again.' She wanted to tell me all about this man she loved, this great adventure that life had brought her, but the manager came quickly along the verandah, 'Time for another practice, for we will never make the week pay unless we put on more turns.'

For hours after, I heard the sound of voices and instruments coming out of the 'Dinnin Room', whilst outside on the verandah men drank tea, wine and *arak*; in the street *droscha* drivers made a great deal of noise with their motor horns and the bells of donkeys sounded clean and bright.

• 5 •

GOHA SULTAN—THE WARD MAID

ONE day, when having tea in a lovely garden of the British Consulate at Shiraz, I felt terribly cold, but supposed it was because I was not yet used to being 5200 feet high. The next day I had to wear a coat even when the sun was shining, so I went for advice to the bank manager, in whose Irish human kindliness one trusted automatically. He suggested malaria. There certainly had been a few mosquitoes at Bushire before the net was put up. The next day I was in bed and the day after in the missionary hospital.

At that time there was much talk of the Government not allowing foreigners to run hospitals; what the future policy will be, who can say?—but if they do send the English away from Shiraz, Ispahan, Yezd and Kerman, and Americans from the northern cities, they will be committing an indescribable folly, even a great sin against their own people, for the missionaries not only alleviate a great deal of suffering but set a magnificent example of efficiency, orderliness, cleanliness and self-sacrifice, all qualities which many Persians still lack.

The Shiraz hospital, planned by that splendid woman, Dr. Stuart, was built round several courtyards, with common wards for the poor and, for the richer, a private apartment consisting of one large room and an annex. The rich Persian patients arrived with rugs, servants, cooking apparatus, etc., and made a home from home, not exactly up to European hospital standards of cleanliness, but the rugs, the *kalyon*, the *mangal* created an atmosphere which reduced their fears of foreign ways and made them more confident and happy.

I was taken to one of these rooms, where the paraphernalia of the

sick-room was reduced to a minimum, and helped into bed by an efficient English sister and an old Persian assistant whose beauty impressed me even then.

'You need not be afraid she'll take anything', said the English sister. What an entirely unnecessary remark, for it was a matter of complete indifference to me just then whether my best evening frock went to a Khan's wife or my most elegant chemise became, by mistake, the blouse of some chic Persian lady!

'We've given her to you because she is perfectly honest. She's been here four years, and says she used to lie and steal like all Moslems, but she's learnt something in the hospital although she is too old to become a Christian. She's the only maid who won't take money from private patients in order to do extra things for them, and so have less time to look after the poor.'

The English sister left and Goha came up to the bed. Persians do not live long, so she could not be what she looked, a withered woman of a thousand years. Her dark brown face, with a fine aquiline nose, was beautiful, but when she smiled a lovely tender personality waked up. Oh, she was shabby, perhaps dirty too. She wore a cheap cotton frock printed with minute tulips, a cotton and silk vest of a very large Englishman, a man's old-fashioned knitted waistcoat, a much faded blue knitted coat, and on top her black and white cotton *chadar*. Over her head was a white kerchief, on her legs long black Persian trousers tucked into modern black stockings which were tied below her knees by strings. Shoes, a bunch of keys tucked into the pocket of the waistcoat, the long steel chain stretching impressively across her chest, a ring engraved with Arabic letters, a ring with a turquoise, completed her toilette. No! There was a round spot of tattoo on each cheek and three spots in the middle of her chin, done, she said, when she was young and silly.

She stood near the bed moving her eyes and arms to heaven, 'Allah, Khudah, bring the exalted lady back to health'. She said it time after time, using many graceful gestures as if the God called Allah in Arabic, the God called Khudah in Persian and her own humble self were making a special pact. She said to the English nurse, when the worst was over, 'My patients always get well, for I pray for them at the beginning'.

Life had not treated her well, but now, possibly at fifty, she was generally gay and hopeful, 'Why not? My work is good; I am kind to the patients, especially to the very poor. They like me.' At seven she had been married and been taken to the home of her husband, a boy of

fourteen; when, at nine, she reached puberty, she had become his wife; at fourteen the first child was born; there had been fifteen, five born dead, ten alive, but only one son and one daughter had grown up. Both of them had made her widowhood such a burden that, four years ago, she had found this job. She touched her breast ten times and crooned a little song, spread out eight fingers and pointed to the earth, 'Allah willed', but she found that will hard to bear.

Her unsatisfied maternal instincts, possibly intensified by births that so easily had become deaths, were slumbering but active. When my fever grew worse she would come over to the bed, give it three or four pats, open her mouth just enough to show the tip of her tongue and produce tiny yodelling sounds which gradually passed into a Persian la-la-le- . . . a lullaby, in the soft quarter tones that are pleasant, but to our ignorant ears too much without either a beginning or an end. The song always finished with two very big pats and a firm effort to swing the Western mattress.

The opening of a bottle of English perfume made her old sunken eyes start into new life. She seized my hands, sucked in the sweetness ecstatically, raised her thin arms upwards to praise Allah for yet another blessing. But when I poured a little on to her withered old hands her eyes danced gaily, she rubbed them together around her neck and down her body under her dress, singing, 'Beautiful, beautiful'. After that, several times a day she brought out the little dressing case that contained the magic bottle.

Her household duties were simple, beginning the day by sprinkling the floor with water and then brushing with an apparatus made of long hard rushes. She dusted by blowing, but that breath, when applied to attending to the wood fire, was a first-class bellows. That *chadar* of hers reduced her efficiency by at least thirty per cent., but then it served so many other purposes; it must have been equivalent to three dozen handkerchiefs, and with the head kerchief added, another half dozen.

The *chadar* could be used as a duster, to shoo away flies, to polish the windows, but oh! the number of times she had to stop to rearrange it over her head before a job could be continued.

For hours she would crouch on the floor in front of the hearth, eating her flat Persian bread and drinking syrup-like tea from a teapot that boiled gently in the warm charcoal ashes. Her interest in European food was enormous; I used to put a spoonful of minced meat on a big piece of bread and push it into her mouth, but best she loved a piece of cake on which there was a blob of jam. Then her toothless gums came

together with a bang and every one of her innumerable lines turned into scintillating smiles. She would dance across the bare cement floor and spring at the bed with pats, laughs, little groans of delight. Cakes ceased to be interesting as objects of consumption, but became glorious possibilities in producing emotions.

She did her simple work with European cleanliness and efficiency, except at rare moments, but she was too efficient in keeping the window and door shut and in covering even a square inch of a naked shoulder or arm, for through the open spaces might come an evil wind that not even Allah could control.

One day a friend sent a bunch of flowers. I was so happy to see them, so glad to smell the moist red and yellow petals that carried me away to England where fevers were few, but to Goha the flowers were madness. She held them tight, spread them all over the bed. 'Beautiful flowers for a beautiful lady', she said in her exaggeratedly polite Persian way. She smelt them eagerly, touched the petals tenderly, then picked up the flowers, putting them in my hands, on my pillow, on my lips. It is difficult to realize how much Persians love flowers.

She slept on a bed without taking off anything except the *chadar*. No matter how often called in the night, she was always patient, but always had to arrange that abominable veil before beginning any job.

It was a great moment in Goha's life when, starting at the bottom, she did up the whole of a long corselet. She stood back and looked, she breathed hard, she lost her breath. She suddenly flew at the long apricot-coloured garment, kissed it, hugged it, pointed to the blue Persian sky, the young leaves on the trees, the flowers. '*Kharnum* beautiful', she said. She stood still and a queer look, shy and youthful, came over her face; she began to sing, to dance. At first her hands and feet only moved, next her shoulders and finally her hips; round and round me she undulated, coming near, going far, laughing, grave, spasmodically kissing a ribbon, a piece of lace.

At one moment she was like a leopard out to kill, at another so sensuous that she seemed to intrude grossly upon my mind, at another she was a swaying willow.

Goha gave an acute little cry and stopped dancing. It was the pain in her side; she was only a very old woman whom the gracious lady had bewitched. Suddenly she shrank into almost nothing, crossed the room to poke the sullen wooden logs in the fire, folded up the towel that lay on a chair by the bed.

The weather became cold when it should have been warm; snow lay

too low upon the hills, and each morning Goha was a little more frail. The tears of old age ran down her cheeks. 'It is too much water', she said faintly. She was entirely dependent upon these foreigners whose God demanded honesty, but she knew they possessed a marvellous human kindness which did not desert an old and faithful servant. Each week she will do less and less until finally they will tell her to rest as long as she wishes on her mattress spread on the floor. There will be bread too, and tea. Allah took away eight children and left two with stony hearts, but the hearts of the foreigners are gentle like the sun in spring. Perhaps they can arrange for her to go to their heaven, for she has served men so long on earth that she cannot be interested in the Moslem paradise.

• 6 •

PERSIAN BOY SCOUTS

EVERY morning I waked to see dawn light the mountains on the far side of the valley, turn the blue mist above the city into gold and shine upon a dome here and there. The dawns would have been perfect, if I had not heard the hills echoing back the volleys of the soldiers, knowing that they were consuming forty-five per cent. of the nation's income, that income that is so badly wanted for roads, schools, hospitals and then more schools. The need for education is so great that it is impossible to write the word school big enough.

Next came breakfast on the verandah, within sight of much beauty, the mountains and the cypress trees always the same, the flowers ever changing. Even when days had followed days and grown to weeks, I never ceased to marvel at the way in which light took possession of the Persian world.

But one day I arranged to be up before dawn and away with the Boy Scouts.

It was five o'clock on a clear April morning when two Scouts walked through the tall gate of the compound and met me just as I stepped on to the verandah. Although Persians, they were punctual, and were the first, except the Governor of the province of Fars, who had been on time. The Scout movement had taught them that and a great deal more, but how much that means, only those who have been in the Middle East can realize and appreciate.

As the sun rose up behind the mountains we walked from one end of

Shiraz to another, a distance of about two and a half miles. The cool of night had not yet gone, so it was pleasant in the nearly empty streets, which at that hour were free from dust. The mountains which surround the Shiraz plain were beautiful, as with the coming of the sun they changed to brilliant reds, purples and blues. We walked quickly, for in only a few hours the heat would be unbearable.

One of the Scouts, who spoke a little English, was trained, ready to be a Scout-master as soon as he had graduated from the secondary school, and the other had several badges. They were dressed tidily and held themselves well, but I was surprised that, though taller than I, they did not take as long steps or walk as quickly. It amused them that a woman should want to walk in step.

We found the Commissioner of the province, three Scout-masters and thirty boys, at the end of the town, by a round lake which is part of the town-planning scheme. They formed fours and started off, a small band, three flutes, a triangle, a cymbal and a drum, playing gaily.

Our way, hardly to be called a road, was covered with so many loose stones that smart marching was impossible. The Scouts were from eight to twenty years old, and differed greatly in appearance, some being smart in every detail, while others were slovenly, with lagging stockings, undone buttons, and loose ties. They all wore khaki shirts and shorts; some had khaki stockings with a top decoration of the Persian colours, red, green and white, whilst others wore stockings of various colours. The word 'khaki' comes from the Persian *khaki*, which means dust-coloured. Their shoes were partly European and partly the far more sensible Persian shoe, the sole made of reinforced pressed cloth, the top woven cotton. These shoes are cool, allow the foot perfect freedom and never slip on any kind of ground. One Scout-master had stockings pulled up at the back with very visible suspenders.

The only important departure from Scout clothes is the Pahlavi cap, which is compulsory for every male in Persia, and which has played a useful and important role in unifying the nation. The hat bears the usual Scout badge, but a crown is added to the top. As in any group of Persians, in any part of Persia, there were a great number of types. All of them had dark brown eyes and almost black hair, several had Jewish features; one looked almost European, at least three had negro blood. Their skin varied in colour from fair to pale brown. They nearly all appeared to be intelligent.

These boys were part of the 1000 Scouts of Shiraz, a city of about 50,000 inhabitants. They had voluntarily joined the group attached to

their schools, for in Persia the movement is a definite addition to school life, with which it is intimately allied. There is a general gathering a few times a year on such occasions as the visit of a distinguished personage. The boys then devote several days to practice, and give displays of pyramids, signalling, jumping, running, and singing national songs. The boys, in groups from each school, go out for the day on Fridays (the only day the schools are shut), choosing a pool for swimming, a pleasant, well-watered and therefore cool village, or a place of historical interest. They aim at ten days camping each year, but it is still difficult to persuade the parents of its advantages. Two evenings a week, after school, are devoted to scouting, the Scout-master being a teacher interested in the movement.

The subjects in which the Scouts are most interested are athletics, drawing, bugling, clerical work, photography, signalling and swimming. Only forty boys have badges, a small number, but it is slow work to introduce such a physically-vigorous movement to Persians. There is much enthusiasm for book learning, but not yet a just appreciation of the educational value of scouting.

The provincial Commissioner is an exceptional man, a poet, musician, patriot, supporter of women's rights and an earnest believer in the Scout movement, through which he hopes to create a Persian youth which will make their country successful.

We marched about a mile, stopped to sing a song composed by the Commissioner, then left the rough road and made for the mountains. At this point there were some ruins called the Three Mills, of which only one was still worked. In complete darkness the great stones were grinding the flour, and one of the millers was cooking his daily bread on a griddle over a charcoal fire: seeing strangers, he offered us some of his thin cakes of bread, but when I ate mine later I was too conscious that they really were made of stone-ground flour.

Where possible the Scouts marched in order to music, occasionally stopping for a song. When the song ended, they shouted '*Amedeh bakh*', 'Be prepared'. The music was partly Persian, with its quarter tones, and partly adapted European melodies.

The mountains, covered with loose stones, were brown and bare except for scattered plants typical of arid lands. These plants, a bluish-grey colour, were frequently spiny and hard, but the leaves made fine rosettes as they spread out on the ground. There was a small purple thyme strongly and pleasantly aromatic, a number of plants with a smell which was charming to the Persians but almost obnoxious to

me, a beautiful orange and yellow poppy, a very fragrant hawkweed, many small flowers which we would be glad to have on our rockeries, and, under some boulders, several patches of gentian.

We came across a hole into which a porcupine disappeared, leaving behind him some eleven-inch-long black and white quills. The Scouts only knew the names of a few aromatic plants used in cooking. Apparently, most of the flowers had no common names, for, as a rule, Persians, who are so fond of their gardens, are not interested in wild nature. The mountains which surrounded us and appeared so near, although some distance away, were very beautiful and ever changing in the early morning light. When we reached the top of the first high hill we looked down at one side upon a perfectly flat valley which was green and very carefully cultivated, where there were many gardens with shade-trees, fruit trees, vegetables and small summer houses, but on the other side, the high mountains had the merest suggestion of green, but their lower slopes were covered with vineyards which stretched as far as the eye could see. They were very tidy, having just been ploughed for the last time before starting to sprout so rapidly that the earliest grapes would be ripe by the end of June.

After two hours walking, we reached our destination, a water-mill near which was a solitary hill, suitable for hoisting the national flag, which they call the 'Holy Flag'; running water, which, in Persia, is always attractive, and, most essential, cool shadows under chenah trees for lunch and the dry flat river bed for drill and games.

The older Scouts put up the flagstaff, and, for practice, erected a tent, whilst the young ones collected camel thorn, a dry prickly plant, for a fire. They hoisted the flag, on which there is a lion and the sun, whilst singing a special song, the general meaning being that the Persian Scouts hail the flag of the conqueror, which represents the independence of the Aryan nation; its green means beauty and prosperity, its white purity and its red is like the colour of a flower that has been dyed in brave and loyal blood. The lion and sun represent the strength of the nation.

When the flag was flying, the Scouts lit the fire, not because it was needed, but as a part of the ceremonial. A fire has special significance to Persians, possibly because of an unconscious feeling which is a relic of Zoroastrianism, whose symbol for good was a fire.

The Commissioner's servant had come along the valley track with a donkey carrying a large tent, two carpets and a quantity of food. He had erected the tent near a little artificial stream which helped to run

the mill. In this tent, which protected us from an already too hot sun, the Commissioner, the two Scout-masters and I sat down on the carpet and had breakfast, which consisted of tea, a sultana cake and Persian bread, eaten with a mixture of ground nuts and cheese. I did not realize, until some time had elapsed, that the host did not look after his guest, but that each must fend for himself.

The green Scout flag was hoisted near the mill, and round it were made several charcoal fires, where the Scouts boiled their tea.

After breakfast, the Scouts divided into groups for drilling, camp work, and gymnastic exercises on a couple of ropes which they had brought and put up in a walnut tree. After several hours of hard work they went out to the flat river bed, in the grilling heat, and practised a new lying-down game which they enjoyed immensely. There was a pleasant, friendly relationship between the Commissioner and the boys, but very much more discussion than would have been allowed in Europe. They all had a great sense of humour, and found time for the laughter whose value is so emphasized by Baden-Powell.

They next played a Persian game called *Chaluh*, in which there are two sides, two sticks, one long and one short, the latter being caught as if it were a ball. This game was very popular and continued till noon.

At lunch time we all collected in the welcome shade of a grove of young plane trees, near a tiny waterfall; we sat on a gay carpet on which a white table-cloth was spread, eating with forks and spoons from aluminium plates. The boys broke up into groups, some sharing a coloured table-cloth. Everyone had brought quantities of Persian bread and bowls of *polou* and *cholou*—the former rice cooked with herbs and eggs or meat, and the latter, rice cooked with fat and served with a separate meat or lentil dish. At the mill many of the Scouts bought mast (curdled milk), considered superior to that produced in the city. This was eaten with pepper and salt, with rice or with dates. The mess those boys got into was unbelievable, but they finally washed themselves, their clothes and their handkerchiefs in one of the little streams. Some of the Scouts had brought boiled eggs, rissoles, cheese and bits of green stuff, peppermint leaves, spring onions, radish tops. As I was a guest, every boy wanted to share his lunch with me; the Commissioner had provided a meal which I supposed big enough for twenty, but that was before I saw how much rice a Persian could eat. A Scout was asked to lend his spoon and use his fingers, in order that the foreign lady might serve herself with more elegance!

After lunch, everyone rested for a time, and then did more gymnastic exercises with the rope. There followed a gay time with games, especially a Persian form of 'Hide the slipper'. I saw no sign of cheating, although Persians are accused of being incapable of playing fair. If cheating does occur, the culprit is reprimanded and given another chance, but if it is repeated, or is of a serious nature, the boy is expelled from the corps. The afternoon ended by competitive tests in visual memory, when several of the boys, without any attempt to hide what they were doing, copied from one another.

About three o'clock the lads scattered on the mountains to walk, to talk and to collect, in a handkerchief, any plants which could be used in the home kitchen. During this time, the Scout-masters studied scouting books, which two of them read in English and translated for the third. At four o'clock everyone drank tea, and at five, the sun being low, we started for home.

As I was talking to some of the best-educated Scouts about Moham-medanism, for which they had little liking or sympathy, one of the Scout-masters sitting at my side began to bow low and repeat his prayers aloud. 'He does it because his heart is so kind', said an older Scout. 'He is one of the old generation, but we are going to be free.'

As we were about to part, the Commissioner said, 'Here you have lived for a day with Young Persia, the boys who will make the new country. There are perhaps only 5000 Scouts in Persia, but they are making new standards. I hope they are taking the best of the West and of the East, from Greece and from Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. I believe in the future of Persia, because I see what can be done with our boys, when they have good teaching.'

As a whole, they were a very decent group, and a few of them had the grace, charm and mental brightness which is characteristic of many Persians. They behaved well, except that, like so many of their compatriots, they spat frequently and did not use their handkerchiefs.

As the boys marched smartly up the street, fourteen hours after they had left home, I felt proud of belonging to a country which had sent such a splendid movement to Persia, to help in her rejuvenation.

· 7 ·

THE WINE OF SHIRAZ

To go to Shiraz, to drink its wine, is one of the dreams of everyone who has read Persian poetry and who loves wine. But the reality!

Around the base of the bare mountains which surround the plain of Shiraz are acres of vines which are as thick as tree trunks, more twisted and gnarled than European trees. That is appropriate enough, for Persia is old, and they say some of the vines, called Jamshids, are as old as Persepolis—2000 years! But Persepolis is in ruins, while the vines, each spring, grow leaves from the old stumps, and in autumn bear inch-long grapes, light or dark, round, thick-skinned, big-seeded, capable, if properly treated, of producing excellent and delicious wine, quite different from anything we have in Europe. Capable! yes, but rarely done—that is the trouble.

Moslem law forbids the drinking of wine, with the result, not that Persian men do not drink, but they do not drink wisely. A Frenchman said scornfully: 'The Persians know how to get drunk, but not how to drink—what a difference'. Also, although they disobey the Koran, in drinking, they are very particular about not making wine, for they, like ourselves, have their little hypocrisies and subterfuges, so that practically all the wine in Persia is made at Shiraz by the Jews, and at Isfahan and Tabriz by the Armenians.

One of the best things the Shah could do for his people would be to import French wine-makers to run a big factory and train Persians for the next five years. The way good grape juice is spoilt is pitiable.

The Jews do know good wine, and they know how to make a profit, and, unfortunately, the latter is bigger if the drinker is so stupid that he does not know when the wine is poor. The best Shiraz grapes grow about forty miles away from the city, at Kholleh, a village at the base of the hills. It is one of the few big properties, most of the vineyards being small peasant holdings. But sixty years ago a Persian borrowed money from a Swede, Dr. Fagergreu, an M.D. of Stockholm, who was attached to the Persian army, and as the Persian failed to pay, the vineyards changed hands.

The grapes were not, however, of great value to the Swede or his immediate descendants, for that adventurous tribe, the Quashgai, when on their autumn trek southwards, robbed the vineyards, not to make wine, for they only pressed out the juice, boiled it till thick, and so pro-

duced grape-treacle, a cheap local substitute for sugar! Sometimes, however, wine was made by Dr. Fagergreu, in great Ali-Baba jars, called *Khomreh*, and some of those jars still exist, eighty years old, perfect for making perfect wine. The grapes, black and white, are brought to Shiraz on donkeys, a journey of two days, the animals travelling only by night, so that the fruit may not be spoilt by even one glance from the sun. It is then tramped out by naked feet and the juice put into these old jars, which are half filled. A few stalks are left in, to give the aromatic flavour which is so attractive and so non-European. The wine is stirred every day with a stick, at the end of which is fixed a six-inch cross of wood. This stick goes from one jar to another, regardless of the quality of the grapes. When sweet wine is wanted, the stalks, which come to the surface in the process of fermentation, are removed after three days, but when a dry wine is being made, they are left in for twenty days.

At the end of three weeks the fermented juice is put through a coarse sieve, the resultant liquor poured into other jars, covered with a cloth, that with matting, and finally sealed with liquid mud and straw, about the same mixture that is used to cover roofs and tennis courts. If the jars are so old that they have practically ceased to be porous, the wine remains in them without diminishing much by evaporation, until 21st March, 'No-Ruz' day, the Persian New Year, when the wine is filtered very carefully and stored away in carboys, for that is our Europeanized way of spelling the old Persian *Karaba* which just means a 'big bottle'. At the end of three years the wine should be refiltered, and drunk at the fourth. Few people have tasted such wine, but having drunk and knowing, do not forget.

As the wine becomes older, it loses colour, until at fifteen years it is white, strong and good. Fortunately for local trade, it is not necessary to keep the wine fifteen years to get the right visual effect, the flavour being generally not appreciated, for a clever merchant can treat a year-old wine so as to produce the 'old' wine in a couple of days.

Most of the wine drunk is not over a year old, and has a rough, harsh flavour, due to having been made partly from eating grapes, which are thin-skinned, juicy, and almost seedless, delicious to eat, but poor for wine. Sweet wine is popular, and can cheaply and easily be made sweeter and nastier by the addition of cane sugar just before selling. The wine usually sold has remained only forty to sixty days in the jars, and so has not had proper time to mature.

The Jews will not tell a lie about the age of wine, when they swear

by Moses, but they have discovered a little play on words which saves both their pockets and their souls. 'Koneh' means both 'rag' and 'Highness', so by putting a rag in the bottle of new wine, they may say, 'By His Highness Moses, the wine is old', and thus not tell a lie. Those who are connoisseurs, and unfortunately they are few, all say—'The enemy of wine is water', and unless wine be put into absolutely dry bottles, bottles dried in the sun, and then washed out with a little wine, the wine becomes unpleasant; but how much worse must that wine be which is deliberately diluted!

In olden days the wine was put into flat, green glass-bottles, charming in shape, ornamented with little blobs of glass, but now, outside of Tehran, it goes into any old beer, gin or whisky bottle that is available. It certainly takes away from the appearance of wine, to pour it out of a gin bottle that has not even a new cork, but is stuffed with cotton wool.

Shiraz wine, if prepared scientifically, could probably become a commercial product of considerable value although the vines are expensive to cultivate, on account of the cost of digging, ploughing and manuring (this only with cow dung). Unfortunately, the grower has many enemies: first and regularly, there is the gardener, whose perquisites vary from ten to fifty per cent.; next come the wandering, pilfering tribes, and last the periodical visitations of locusts. There are no real factories, the wine being prepared domestically in many houses, and commercially in large, but not very large quantities, by merchants.

The preparation of wine as here described is not the way it is made in Europe, but all the details were explained by one of the few men in Shiraz who superintends the making of wine that *is* good.

Perhaps in all Shiraz nothing takes the visitor more vividly back to old times than to walk from a garden, down some steps under crumbling arches, across a tumble-down courtyard, and into a cellar where the Ali-Baba jars lie in heaps, waiting for their grapes, or, in the late autumn, to see those jars standing orderly and upright, each with its mud cover, waiting to let out the wine which is going to bring so much cheer to some, and so much oblivion to others.

If the traveller to Shiraz wants good wine, he may find it if he is lucky, but it is not waiting in tidy bottles, with tidy labels, for the mere passer-by. After much hunting, a Jew, said to be honest, was sent to me. He had a pleasant jolly face, in spite of a two-day beard, and shook hands as if we were old friends.

'I am told you are honest', I said. He smiled, as if it were a joke, and

after many hand-shakes, departed to return the following morning with samples. Glass after glass I tasted, and—what I left in the glass he put back into the bottles! Then I believed the story about two Persian merchants. The man from Ispahan was so careful that he put his cheese in a jar, and just took it out and wiped it over the surface of his bread; but the man from Shiraz sealed the jar and only wiped the bread on the outside.

Anyway, by paying double, I purchased some three-year-old wine which was delicious, and, moreover, I had it put into old Ispahan bottles of sea-greenish glass that were fragile, irregular and graceful, having, even in their solidity, some of the charm of the wine itself.

Nowhere in Persia is wine well made according to European standards. Ispahan is also famous for its wines, but good wine is rare there too. The Tabriz makers are best. Tehran is full of wine-shops, but the same label is no proof that the bottle contains the same liquid. It is, however, nearly always strong, and can be guaranteed to produce a cheap, quick 'drunk'.

Sa'di and Omar Khayyum sang about the effects of wine, not its quality. Today many a Persian, or sojourner in Persia, could sing as sweetly if they had the gift, but the connoisseur, no matter what his poetical qualifications, would generally have to keep to prose.

A garden in Shiraz, any time between May and September, may become a very pleasant place if the host knows how to make wine, and brings out his decanter of the tawny liquid. Then, indeed, do the flowers blossom, the birds sing, and the blue sky become azure.

*And as much as wine has played the Infidel,
And robbed me of my robe of Honour—Well,
I wonder often what the Vintners buy
One-half so precious as the stuff they sell.*

PERSIAN GARDENS

AT last the little that was left of me had permission to leave the hospital. The idea of returning to the hotel filled me with dread, so when I learnt that the Bank people were going to take me to their lovely garden, from which there were wonderful views over Shiraz, I felt as if the gates of paradise had really opened. There was the view over the

city, separated from the compound by brown and green fields, the view up to the near mountains which seemed as if they would tumble down and crush us and the view of the encircling mountains which were big, soft, blue, and sometimes snow-covered.

I soon knew every detail of that garden, with its great pool, its bed of stocks, wallflowers and snapdragons, its avenues of cypresses and oranges. I began to visit other Persian gardens, which songs and poems have invested with such superlative beauty. Their value is comparative, not absolute, for they are largely so charming because Persia has little water—it is the desert that makes them attractive. When the traveller first arrives in Persia and is taken miles to a tiny intermittent waterfall that is six feet high and is described as wonderfully beautiful, exquisite, he thinks the native somewhat unbalanced, if not a little mad, but when he has been there some months, has got up early enough to see leaves green and gay at six but faded and almost brown by nine, his point of view alters.

After riding or motoring across miles of parched earth, where the air dries the skin and the dust penetrates so deeply into ears, nose, and eyes that it seems as if it could never be removed, the Europeans learn to feel the amazing and stimulating freshness of air that has passed over even a few feet of water. He too begins to have an emotion that is allied to worship for a little pond, for the stream that runs into or away from it, especially if it flows over clean turquoise tiles which give to the water some of the loveliness of the sky which is always blue, although at noon a cruel blue and in midsummer a whitish blue that is almost pathetic.

Persian gardens are all enclosed by high mud walls, often topped by straw and branches, as an extra precaution against intruders, for the houses have so many doors and windows that almost anyone could be a successful burglar.

Nearly every garden has a pool, round, square or oblong, with simple rectangular stone or cement edges. The wise keep fish to eat the mosquito larvae, but no one ever grows anything in water, which has no need of adornment, although in the middle of a large pool there may be a tiny flower bed. Reflections play a big part, for the clarity of the air, the brightness of the light, gives them a special value. If the porch of the house has pillars, their number is doubled, as at the famous Chihil Sutun of Ispahan; if the facade is gay with tiles, their gaiety is found again in the water. Wise gardeners always arrange that trees should grow near, and often stand the graceful flower-pots around the edge of

the pools, that the blossoms they have produced with so much care may be multiplied.

Chenahs are the most characteristic trees, but in Shiraz there are many cypresses, suggesting Italy, but taller, having more conspicuous and ornamental trunks, for the branches in this dry land often start a long way from the ground, thus providing yet another upright line to gardens which are characterized by the parallel and the rectangular.

There are fruit trees everywhere, not as part of a utility scheme, but as part of the beauty; almond blossoms come first, a perfect colour against the sky; cherry blossoms last only a few days but are delicate upon the trees and flutter charmingly to the ground, floating for a few minutes like snowflakes upon the water; the quince petals are large and generously modelled. The orange blossom is much later, when, unfortunately, the shiny green leaves have become dusty, but for at least one week of moonlight the white buds, growing so thickly together, shine like little lamps. By day the open flowers are almost too stiff and hard, but their perfume, if you can stand it, makes the garden luxurious by day and dreamy by night. The pomegranate tree gives a rich reddish colour when the young leaves are just sprouting, and at the same time the judas tree is a cloud of purple loveliness, whether next to a cherry, breaking the line of an avenue of cypresses or against the glorious background of a sunlit mud wall.

Plants arranged in arabesques or other designs are grown in flat or rounded beds which have to be watered constantly, or in square or rectangular shallow pits into which a flow of water is regulated twice a week or daily, the amount depending upon the needs of the plant and the money which the owner can afford to spend on that precious liquid. All water in Persia belongs to somebody, is diverted to each garden with great care and at considerable expense; it is only the sun that can drink up water without payment, and unfortunately it never seems satisfied.

In the spring the characteristic flower is the sweet-scented stock which grows, not out of the brown earth, but in beds covered with green clover, so that every particle of their brightness appears to advantage—but spring comes with such suddenness and goes with such a rush that flowers which last weeks in England have in Persia only a short, if very vigorous, life—today a sweet pea seed, tomorrow a plant, the next day a mass of flowers and then—nothing. Lilacs grow in the garden, and roses, but only an early riser sees either at their best, yet even when withered the blossoms have a strong, everlasting smell. The roses generally are the half single, old-fashioned kind; the rich and more ex-

quisite sophisticated creations of Europe are being introduced here and there in the provinces, but are in nearly every garden in Tehran. The 'Rose of Shiraz', which plays so big a part in Persian designs, for textiles or pottery, is much more complicated and much less naive than the original wild flower.

In the spring the stock makes night so fragrant that hovering dust is forgotten; when it has gone, its place is taken by honey-suckle, that by phlox, and if there is no other fragrance the gardener brings out pots of tuber roses or a great white jasmine, for a garden without sweetness is hardly a garden to him.

In spring, even untidy gardens can be beautiful, for the wild poppy is delightfully gay, although it may be growing where there ought to be lettuces, and the judas tree is such a glory with its reddish-purple flowers springing out of the grey bark that any sensible person would travel all the way to Persia to see them—and them alone.

The intense relief of getting into a Persian garden after the desert gives a sense of rest, of beauty, and of repose, which we who live in the big garden called England can never realize. And the high wall is part of the wonder, for it is like a great hand shutting away, pushing away, the cruel land from which the gardens have only been created by enormous patience, enormous labour.

Some gardens are watered by streams, generally controlled and intermittent, but many only by water brought from one or more deep wells, men and oxen working together at some, but only men at others. Cheap labour has made Persian gardens possible, but today, outside Tehran and its suburbs on the hills, few are really beautiful, well-kept, for the people are poor, weeds grow wildly and luxuriantly and the Persian gardener is a veritable connoisseur in laziness and the art of conversation. It is impossible not to feel sorry for him when in the early morning and late afternoon he waters the flowers, for then he cannot sit down. The eager European who tries to make changes only hits his head against habits that are 3000 years old, and one day finds that there are no gardeners, not even lazy ones. At Tehran I had a flat in the lovely municipal garden which was always gay and fragrant, although the gardeners seemed so lazy and talkative. As I was dressing I used to watch them sitting on the little lawn outside my window, whilst the eldest recited poetry and the youngest cut the grass. They worked long hours and so made up for their odd little ways. They frequently led me to see especially fine roses and to enjoy the perfume of an immense bed of brilliant phlox.

When the fruit arrives, the cherries on his tree become rubies to a Persian, the apricots another kind of jewel, the oranges full summer moons, the pomegranates setting suns. Flowers there may be none, but in rare jewels the garden is rich. That is what the poets said, that is what the Persian feels and that is what even an Englishman realizes, sometimes. Spend ten hours on a road across a desert, look at a ripe cherry, a soft skinned peach, and you will understand. Contrast gives an intensified value which produces a state of mental extravaganza.

And the singing birds! Of course, just like in the Arabian Nights. The bulbul, or Persian nightingale, is probably better than the nightingale of Provence, which is the best in Europe, and, as in Provence, it sings by day. Perhaps it is gayer, certainly its song is more variable and each bird has a greater individuality. It would not even be quite foolish to give a name to the one that sings in the orange tree by the pool, another to the bulbul in the peach tree and yet another to the bird that never leaves the pine avenue. The goldfinch, our own bird, and the golden oriole are gay additions to the garden. The goldfinch has a charming song that goes on for weeks, and the oriole sends out its few, clear, bell-like sounds all the summer; even on the hottest day in August those cool notes fall pleasantly from the high plane trees upon the dead earth. The grey-backed crow is everywhere, making its ugly noises, but I always liked to see them sit on the top of the cypresses until they bent over, looking like the designs on Paisley shawls. There are folks who say that design is a folded hand, but watch a garden with cypresses and crows and you'll know. The green jays are delightful on a hot summer day, for then the world becomes unbearably brown, except for the blue and purple shadows at mornings and evenings on the mountains. Just as you are longing for green as the one hopeful colour in the world, the jays come flying down upon a tree, the sun making their wings almost sparkle, but that Persian light can give a spectacular effect even to the pale grey wings of a pigeon.

Some gardens have gazelles, which have to be kept within bounds and taken for walks, but the amazingly graceful animals become as tame as dogs and almost as affectionate. Their tiny feet, their fine noses and great eyes give a finishing touch of graciousness.

In the richer gardens, there is, when flowers are dead and fruit not yet ripe, the gaiety of coloured tiles in the runnels and on the front of the house. Their brightness when seen through flowing water on a mid-summer day is a partial compensation for spring that has passed and autumn that is yet to come.

The Persian garden is satisfactory, delightful in its own place, but poem and story have given it an exaggerated value. Tradition too has played its part, for when the Shirleys went to Persia in Elizabeth's time, they came home with such wonderful tales that we still hear their echoes. This Eastern garden is where it has been for hundreds of years, but we have learnt and gone ahead. Europeans need not sigh for Persian gardens, for, if they would avoid curves and add more pools with severe lines, they could have gardens more beautiful than any in Persia, in spite of not being able to grow oranges and judas trees.

But Europe has not the nights when the Persian garden comes into its own. It is so lovely in the garden from six o'clock to sleep time that everyone forgets the terrors of the middle of the day. How could it be otherwise, asked a Persian boy, as he sat by the garden pool on a perfect night, reciting poetry, almost speechless with the beauty of the stars and the moon in the sky. Their reflections in the water and the warm soft wind act like a narcotic, making everything and everyone perfect.

· 9 ·

THE GOOD SERVANT

SPRING sped by in the Bank garden, flower succeeded flower until I was almost giddy, for months of our year were packed into a few weeks, but every morning, quietly and inevitably, as if time did not exist, the Baghi walked up and down the path where the snapdragons grew four feet high, bright and fragrant. With one hand she pushed the tiny pram with the new baby, at one side walked the rosy-cheeked little girl with her strange Persian doll, and on the other side she held the round fat hand of the gayest small boy in the world.

She took care of the baby, she took care of the little girl, but she loved the boy. She did her duty to the baby and the girl, but what she did for the boy was pleasure and delight. There was a great difference. Duty made her face dull, but love made it bright.

But one day she was unhappy, for that little vixen, the daughter of the gardener, aged only twelve, had started a scandal, accusing the Baghi of immorality on her day out. The nurse was a Christian, not because she thought it would pay, but because she loved, violently and devotedly, the capable, rather hard missionary woman-doctor who had saved her eyesight. She had not seen the hardness, for she knew only

the tenderness and care that, day after day, for four months, had led her from darkness to light.

The Baghi could not face the scandal; she thought she would have to go to another town, for she did not even look at men, no matter how close they pressed upon her in the street. She did not want another husband when the first had been such a failure. It was difficult to be a woman-servant in a house where all the others were men, but she was very particular, hiding behind a chair if one came into the room when she had no *chadar*; and always having her meals alone.

The Baghi was the fourth child, born when her mother was twenty-two, a little worn out by twelve years of marriage. Her father was a postman, who could neither read nor write, but managed quite often to deliver his letters correctly because he put a special mark on each. He wasn't much good at anything except beating his wife, so only the necessary conventional tears were shed when he died. It was difficult for the widow, so she married her only daughter young. At eight the Baghi went, as second wife, to the home of her husband, aged twenty-six, but slept in a separate room till she was ten. She did not understand marriage, she was afraid, but she accepted, as inevitable, what happened to other girls.

Her first baby came when she was thirteen. The Baghi is now thirty-seven, and looks very young for a Persian woman, but, even after the passing of twenty-four years, her eyes grew big and strained at the remembrance of what she had suffered, and suffered for nothing, for the baby died of smallpox towards the end of its first year. Two more sons were born to her, but, to her deep regret, no daughter. 'Daughters are so much better than sons. I never had a sister either.' Years passed, her husband smoked more and more opium, beatings increased and the money he gave her decreased until she had none.

'Did you never beat him?'

She raised her eyes and laughed. 'No! I scolded him very much, but in one way he was good. He did not starve his horses like so many *droscha* drivers.'

During these difficult years her mother, who had refused to marry again, was her greatest friend.

'One can never like a father as well as a mother', she said, tears in her eyes.

Their greatest joy was the weekly ceremonial bath at the Hammam, where they spent at least half a day, being washed and massaged by a woman-attendant, for which she, being poor, paid sixpence. As her hair

was going grey she had it hennaed, but in her set, in her town, it was not the fashion to have the nails reddened. On very special occasions, like New Year, she had a hair wave. The Hammam was her club, where she arranged to meet her women friends, talking and gossiping over their unending meals of bread, *charmi* (a rissole of meat and peas made by her mother), pomegranates and immense quantities of tough lettuce.

Her two sons had grown up, learning to read and write, but one, a clerk, had been away for nine years in distant Birjand. He wrote, but someone had to read his letters, and she was obliged to go to a professional letter-writer to send messages to him. Her ignorance of writing made Birjand very far away.

The son at home, who was a chauffeur, was conscripted at twenty-one, but found the army pay so inadequate that the Baghi not only gave all she had, but borrowed at an exorbitant rate and was busy trying to pay off the debt. Her husband demanded money. She refused. There were quarrels, and finally he took a second wife who was a prostitute. It is now the law that a man can have a second wife only with the consent of the first.

'But with money you can do anything', she said cynically. 'He gave a few krans to a mullah who married him, on the quiet, to this girl who was the child of his first wife by another man. He always loved the first wife and did not beat her, so he married her daughter. He said he found in her all the past youth and beauty of her mother.'

The Baghi then left her husband and came to the English family, arriving worn, thin and miserable, but after two years of freedom and kindness she became young again. Her husband sometimes worried her because he wanted money, and was annoyed at her present content. She thought she would be quite happy if she had had a daughter and could sometimes see the son in Birjand, and she would like to be able to buy some nice clothes; she was even wondering if she would have her hair bobbed like the child of a relation. At present her hair was short at the sides, as a compromise with her traditions, but down her back hung a thin, untidy braid. She patted her misshapen body and said sadly, 'I know I am not a beautiful shape. I would like to be straight like a European, but here a woman suffers too much when a child is born. I would like to have my face very pretty too, but not to put on colour and powder—that is a disgrace. The gardener's wife made herself look so much like a street woman that he locked her in the house.'

There was a cry from under the orange trees, and the Baghi darted away to rescue the boy she loved so much. Soon she was back again on

the carpet which was spread in the shadow of the walnut trees. She had been, at first, a little shy in talking of herself to a foreigner, but gradually her face changed. A rosy colour came into her cheeks. She had ceased to be phlegmatic and plain. She was alive. The memory of beatings, poverty, misery and inferiority was forgotten in the excitement of being of interest to a foreigner, a representative of the wonderful, beautiful and romantic West.

· 10 ·

PERSEPOLIS

EARLY on 21st April we started off to see Persepolis; it was still spring in the desert, and there was a faint bloom of green on the brown land. The temperature was perfect, the colours were perfect, and the road was not bad enough to distract from the beauties of the journey.

Persepolis is the most famous ruin in Persia, perhaps, at the moment, the best-known in the world.

It is forty miles north of Shiraz, standing on a platform 1500 feet long, partly artificial, built out of the side of the Zagros Mountains and facing the classic plain of Mervadasht, a great flat fertile land, ten miles across, some hundreds long. Persepolis is backed by bare and unproductive mountains, well protected by walls from its enemies, but at its feet is a land capable of feeding many thousands of people.

Today, Persepolis, the great palace of Darius (521 B.C.) and Xerxes (485 B.C.), is a ruin; the great cities of their time have disappeared, but the tall columns looked out on a land where there are many small villages and where, on the plain, thousands of sheep, goats, donkeys and camels were feeding and where hundreds of acres of barley and wheat were making the land a vivid green. There were small groups of nomads in their square tents made of a thick black material, ragged, dirty and unkempt. Some of the women were spinning, some of the men were guiding the flocks and herds. All the animals were in a good condition except the cows, which were miserably thin.

Persepolis is dead, but the great plain is still alive. We passed some Quashgai on the northward summer trek, donkeys and camels laden with people and goods. One group of young women were delightfully gay with floating, bright cerise skirts and head-dresses covered with coins. Two of them were nursing their babies as they sat high on their camels. They looked at us haughtily. It was not surprising, for

we Europeans were dressed drably, practically, and a motor car, when passing a camel, always seemed neurotic.

Persepolis was placed just in that very position, not because of the idle fancy of some great monarch, but because it was the ultimate expression of the economic importance and productivity of the plain. A hundred miles away, another great plain, Kazerun, has the remains of another king and another town, Shapur the Sassanian, A.D. 530. His city too was the expression of the importance of a flat fertile plain where, except under exceptional circumstances, there is not abundant but there is sufficient water. In every plain in Persia there are still villages in a similar position to Persepolis, high at the side of the plain, their back against the mountains. Near Shiraz, the Metropolitan Museum of New York is, under Mr. Henry Upton, working at a ruin in many ways similar to Persepolis, although much smaller, where there have been towns of at least four periods super-imposed upon one another.

The 'classic plain' of Persepolis is said to have been connected with at least 600 miles of productive valleys and plain that went north from one to another towards Tehran.

Unfortunately it is only in recent years that the excavations of this very important site have been done scientifically. For a long time Persepolis was the home of brigands—the shots from their rifle practice can still be seen—because they were the only people courageous enough to face the possibility of meeting *jinn* and other night wanderers. The first excavators here, as in many places in the world, were not scientists but treasure seekers. The French began the serious work, but it is only since 1926, when the Museum of Chicago financed the operations, putting Dr. Hertzfeld in charge, that there have been great results. Dr. Hertzfeld is an expert on everything Persian, and has the respect and confidence of all.

The old palace is surrounded by great walls of stones, irregular, apparently irrational in shape, but now so much a part of the land that they give an effect of simplicity. The most impressive part is not the Hall of One Hundred Columns, of which only a few stand, looking very sophisticated against a background of lovely-coloured, fantastically-shaped mountains, but the many staircases, here, there and everywhere, decorated on each side by a frieze of figures moving upwards, people of many races, some captives, some free, some bearing offerings of food, others armed. There are so many people moving persistently upwards, that you almost feel there must be truth in that super-

impertinent cuneiform tablet, 'I am Xerxes the great King, the King of Kings, King of the nations with their many people and King of the great earth even to afar'.

As a result of the way the figures are arranged, two on each step, one shorter than the other, or two with one putting its foot up on the next step, there is a feeling of real movement. Thousands of years have passed, but still you sense the awe, the fear, the hope of all those men who walked up, stair after stair, to meet the king who was, whether enemy or friend, almost a god.

Was it impertinence that, for an instant, I had an emotion of apparently infinite pity for man that has been and is? I wanted to go to each of those figures, take their hand and whisper, 'Look up! The stairway goes on forever and ever. There is infinite hope.'

What splendid stairways—each step so low, so wide, that even trippers get a sense of dignity and rhythm. Why has the modern Persian forgotten what great Xerxes planned, and made the steps in his modern buildings so steep that one almost needs an alpenstock for going up and down?

Great winged bulls stand at the gate, some with the faces of men, very strong and still, very ornate with their curled beards, hair and pompous tails. At their feet a Persian family was having a meal of *polou*, lettuces and oranges. As I passed by, they, with their charming Persian hospitality, offered to share their food. They said, moving their hands gracefully towards the mounds of rice, 'Please, we beg you, will you not lunch with us', and I replied as befitted the occasion, 'Thank you very much, I beg to be excused, for I have to go on quickly, but I am grieved to be deprived of the delight of having food with you'. Politeness is a pretty Persian game which makes life pleasant, dignified, and often easy. I wish the Western world could play it with their grace.

I passed on into the bright sunshine, eager to see the fine carvings that had just been uncovered from the powdered brick that had protected them so long. In April, 1933, the figures marching up the steps seemed to have just come out of the sculptor's hands, but in twenty years, perhaps in ten, the water and the wind will have spoilt the black stone and others will see the freshness only in drawings and photographs. A Persian woman examined the figures carefully, touched the well-groomed beards, touched the lotus flowers they carried in one hand. She looked a little puzzled and then asked, 'Why, when they have beards, do they carry a shaving-brush?'

Some day perhaps, when Persepolis is finished, there will be a de-

scriptive pamphlet at the gate to explain the part the lotus played in the old religions, the meaning of the stylized palms and cedars, the nationality of men with round caps, fluted caps, men who carried short swords, men who carried bows in cases.

Persepolis is dominated by two motives, so often repeated, that unless they had a religious or family significance, they must have become tiresome—the strong man or god who kills the upright lion with one or two swords, their feet against each other, always in exactly the same position. Did he utterly defeat the monster with its terrific bird-like claws, did he merely receive wounds which could be healed or did he too give up his life in the battle?

The second motive is the bull and the lion, both aggressively masculine, struggling mightily, not dishevelled, not torn, but every curl in place, like some famous gladiator, showing off before a huge audience: perhaps they are a symbol of the constellations that came and went with the years. No one knows, but it is amusing to guess.

Today in modern Persia, at No-Ruz, an egg is placed on a looking-glass on a table and it is said that at the moment when No-Ruz begins, the egg is turned, perhaps by the horns of a bull, perhaps by the horns of the new moon.

In doorway after doorway a king walks with attendants who protect him from the sun, carry a carefully folded towel, follow humbly after his majesty. Once some of these figures were decorated with mighty jewels—the holes where they were set still exist, but will never be filled again, except perhaps by the many gay flowers that, in the spring of the year, grow and blossom in the tiny spaces between the stones, turning parts of Persepolis into a delightful dry rock garden. But above the king is Ormuz; this figure is now copied everywhere in Persia, on buildings, on rings, on brass and silver work. It has become a symbol of the new nationalism, of a return to all that is purely Persian, to pre-Islamic, pre-Arabic days. To the idealists, it means light and salvation for Persia, but to others it is mere Jingoism.

In Tehran there is a house, in florid Renaissance style, which has a figure of winged Ormuz fixed over a frieze of Italian fruits and flowers, just to show the owner is a good up-to-date nationalist.

Under the palace are great excavations, possible places where water was stored just as it is stored in underground cement cisterns in parts of Persia today.

The Persians come to Persepolis to gain courage to forge ahead with the modernization of their country—seeing what Persia had, once upon

a time, of civilization, of culture, of beauty and architectural ability, they forget their shame that, not so long ago, Russia almost possessed the north, England the south, and real Persia was only a tiny morsel in between. There some rejoice that forty-five per cent. of the national income goes on the army, and, in an orgy of nationalism, even dream that the army will go out to extend Persia again from Samarkand on the east to Baghdad on the west. These are the foolish ones; the wise look at the Zoroastrian Ormuz and repeat his message, which, if put into practice, would make any person and country satisfactory, 'Think the good, speak the good, do the good'.

Just then the woman who had offered the *polou* came up and put a big orange into my hand. I held it close, I could not eat that symbol of friendliness. I watched that gracious woman go, and as she went she left behind a trail of orange peel. Orange peel in Persepolis! But later, where she and her family had lunched, I saw eggshells, chicken bones and broken glass! Persepolis is unique, but trippers are universal.

The harem of the palace of Darius has been restored, exactly right in places, approximately in others, in order that Dr. Hertzfeld and his assistants may have a house and give hospitality to some of those who come to visit Persepolis. The modern rooms have windows, but the original harem was almost dark, probably to keep the women white and delicate, a stimulating contrast to the brown men.

The coloured atrium outside, which is being reproduced in wooden columns with cubist representations of the original double bull-headed capitals, is delightful, but it is almost uncanny to see the carpenters using such simple and primitive methods.

There is little general understanding in Persia of the reason America is willing to spend so much money on excavations; there are still many people who think they only dig to find gold and jewels which they will, unless prevented, hide and take away, or because they are a little queer or as a pleasant cover for espionage. Very few yet realize the continuity of history or the fascination of following the development and unfolding of racial cultures. But education is making great strides and young men are growing up who are very unlike their parents.

There is a tradition that Persepolis contained a great library of Zoroastrian books, amongst them the Avesta which Darius had ordered to be written in silver and gold on 12,000 ox hides. Some think there never was a library, but that the Avesta came down by accurate oral tradition, like some old Indian books, certain families passing on, from generation to generation, not only the words, but even the inflections.

After seeing the remains we had lunch with that clever and entertaining Dr. Hertzfeld in his delightful dining-room, where every detail of decoration showed that he was an artist as well as a scientist.

Persia has, fortunately, passed a Law of Antiquity before all her treasures have been taken out of the country. Everything of artistic value before the end of the Zend dynasty must be considered a national monument; the Government takes possession, possibly paying half the value, of all national monuments on private property; the right of the State to excavate can be transferred to suitable societies, but all objects found must be divided between the State and the excavators, usually half to each, an expert deciding how the division should take place. A Government representative is constantly with each group of excavators, some of them pleasant, trusting and helpful, others officious and painfully suspicious. Antique dealers, who have, directly or indirectly, committed unbelievable archaeological sins in the past, are now registered and hence more easily compelled to give to the Government objects which will, some day, find an honoured place in a national museum. But many pieces of beauty and importance are even now smuggled out of the country. Someone said that the chief industry of Persia is still smuggling—antiques out, sugar, tea and spirits in. The only serious flaw in the law is that there is no compulsion to make plans and take photos as the excavating proceeds.

There is a majesty about Persepolis which makes power and autocracy super-attractive. As you walk up and down those staircases you say, 'What price democracy now?' but if your eye catches the long line of captives also making their way up, up the rhythmic steps, you know the answer.

The kings lived and were strong, but how much they feared death can only be realized by making the very bumpy journey of three miles across the Pulvar river, and in spring across the emerald plains to Takhtel Rostam, a high cliff of rich-coloured rocks where there are four tombs, at a great height above the valley.

Fortunately, one tomb had scaffolding, in order that the experts might mount to study the inscription. Where experts can go the inexperienced can follow. The door had gone, but once it had swung upon a mighty rock hinge; the three groups of three tombs inside were immense, the lids upon the tombs solid slabs of stone six inches thick. There the dead would surely rest safely, undisturbed. The tombs have finely sculptured fronts and above each are Zoroastrian symbols, the winged figure which is so frequent in Persepolis, a fire altar with the

crescent moon above and a priest at prayer. Near the valley floor are bas-reliefs, made by Sassanians a thousand years later, to commemorate victories over the Romans, the horse solid and heavy, the king cumbersome.

In one of these tombs Darius the Great is said to have lain. But in spite of the height above the ground, the thick door, the heavy coffin lids, the kings who thought themselves so safe, so inaccessible, have disappeared. Cyrus too had disappeared from his great tomb, which lies some miles across the plain.

Persepolis has gone, its kings have gone, but down on the plain a tribeswoman is suckling her child, a goat is suckling its kid, and in Tehran the Shah Pahlavi is nursing his new-born land.

We started for the return journey in time to reach Shiraz before an hour after sunset. It was a splendid run, the colours glorious and rich, the mountains rugged and impressive, but most beautiful of all was the famous view through the Tang gates on to Shiraz, lying safe and productive in its green plain, encircled and protected by its wall of purple mountains.

• II •

AN EVENING IN SHIRAZ

LIFE was always entertaining at Shiraz, even had its poetical moments. Would you like to see the mountains dance, the mists play leap-frog on the hills, the Great Bear rush across the sky, roll happily at lovely Cassiopeia's feet, growl at tall Orion and disappear in the unknown horizon?

Then come to Shiraz in the early days of May, to a garden that I know, a Persian garden made lovely every minute of the year by European brains. The *droscha* will drop you at the end of a dusty narrow lane and you must hit the knocker hard on the rather shabby door, which is studded thickly with delightful sun-rayed circles of iron, each with a two-inch protruding spike. People have written their names on the door, of course, but even beautiful Persian writing is, in the wrong place, no better than English scribbling.

When at last the door opens, just a little, there appears the usual rather untidy Persian man-servant, no shoes, no tie, but a hat and a very pleasant, friendly expression. The servant is shabby but never servile; is friendly but not familiar. That is the result of the long ages of culture

which have made Persians realize the value of good manners, not only for one class but for all—not only for riches but as an adornment to poverty too.

We went there an hour before sunset, to see the long hedge of pink roses become purple in the changing—you can hardly call it fading—light. There were green leaves on the bushes, but they could hardly be seen, the roses were so thick—just for one week the roses are lovely—one day there are none, one day they come, and in a few days they will have gone. They don't grow, but literally burst forth. That is spring in Persia, so sudden, so lovely, so intense, so evanescent.

There was a row of chairs under the grey-barked chenah trees, opposite a line of purple and bronze irises, and a table with glasses. The servant brought cigarettes, lighted one in his mouth and gave it to me. The first time that happens it is difficult, but the second time, just out of sight of the gracious one, you nip off the end and smoke, unworried. The garden was fresh that end of a hot dry afternoon, for the host had, in an extravagant and hospitable moment, bought extra water, enough to wet every bed. The leaves of the quince tree were nearly perky; the violas lifted their impudent, gay faces on taut stalks; the carnations almost scorned the strings that held them up.

The conversation was a mixture of English, French and German, with a Persian word here and there. The sun set rapidly, the sky changed from second to second; everything changed too. The tiredness of the day disappeared alike for man and plants, and they looked forward to twelve hours of repose, of soft, cool air. There was talk of Europe, that far-away land, where so many had no work, where people were cold, but where there were theatres, books, music.

Music! that was the greatest difference between the East and West. A Persian who had been in Europe, said pathetically, 'Here it is desolate without music', and all he meant was a hotel band; he knew nothing of Bach, Beethoven, Scriabin, Sibelius—had not even heard their names. Persia has architecture, painting, sculpture, philosophy, literature, but practically no music. The Easterners say—and many Europeans agree—that they are less material than we, and yet it is Europe that created symphonies. At moments the difference between East and West seems nothing—you read Firdausi, Hafiz, Sa'di, and at the bottom we are so alike; you talk long hours to men and women and even wonder why we are different nationalities, and then, music—and with it a great wall rises up between our culture and theirs.

Darkness was coming gradually upon us, at least the darkness which

is not day, for already the moon was taking command of the sky. The hedge of purple roses shone faintly under the trees! The irises had disappeared, but, across the garden, a long trellis suddenly became alive, for it was covered with great white rose-buds which caught every ray of the moon.

'We'll move into another place', said the host, 'where we can smell the yellow roses and see the moon turn that dreadful modern Persian house into a palace fit for Meijum and Leila'. In a land where marriage is mechanised that story of love-mad Meijum and his beloved Leila is everywhere, on walls, on tiles, in writing, in conversation.

The servants moved the chairs and tables under the apricot trees, where the lights and shadows were vivid and immovable on that quiet night. They brought a big brass wine cooler, designed by the epicurean host, in which stood bottles of wine surrounded by that snow-ice which is brought down to the city each morning on donkeys. The men and animals walk twenty miles up to the mountain in the late afternoon, rest in the shade of the trees or a little tumbledown house in a garden, for part of the night, then dig up the blocks of ice-snow which had been stored away in pits in the winter, and, long before dawn, are on their way to the city so that the sun may not melt away their loads.

That is how men got ice in Greece and Rome. We Europeans suddenly felt ourselves linked to the old culture, so closely that the thousands of years since Alexander conquered Persia seemed as nothing. We were not merely people living a few years, but behind each of us was a past full of memories and achievements. The Persian said, 'What does it matter about Greece and Rome? It is only certain that it would be much better to have an ice factory.' He was right, and so were we, but there was a great gulf between our points of view.

The wine was clear, a lovely deep yellow, the glasses shone in the moonlight. Cheerio, *Prosit, Bonne chance, Salaam aki*, came the greetings, and we drank, united in man's universal panacea. That garden was one of the few where Shiraz wine, famous for so many centuries, sung of by so many poets, was fit to drink. Perhaps the wine of the poets had never been particularly good, but seemed so for lack of something better. But this wine had been made carefully, and lay waiting year by year until just the right people met together.

On the table was a great plate of sandwiches, made of doubled-over pieces of Persian bread with cheese, ham and radishes inside.

'To eat cheese and then to drink wine is the only way to appreciate the delicate flavour of the wine', said the European.

'No, it is only comprehensible with meat', answered a Persian, and *kabobs* were ordered.

We discussed what Europeans, isolated in Persian towns, might do to make life satisfactory or endurable, the possible compensations for what the West offers so richly.

'There is peace here and no rush', said one, 'If you wish to think, there is time, and quiet too, a few sounds in the city, and a mile out, absolute silence'.

'I like my work helping the sick. There are so many willing to make things better at home and so few here.'

'In Europe there is nothing like these early mornings and the nights. If I could get together a group of twenty congenial people, Shiraz might be paradise.'

We looked between the shining trunks of the trees and saw the moon lighting up the tall flight of steps that led to the high verandah.

'You see', said the host, 'the hideous, vulgar place where I live every day has disappeared, and in its place stands an enchanted palace. Which of you will walk up the steps and be Sheerin going to greet Koshru as he wakes after the long sleep of the tired hunter?'

One woman looked at her riding breeches, another at her short tennis frock. That delightful man laughed.

'Very well, you stay here and be modern women, but we will drink enough wine to think we see the incomparable fair Sheerin.'

The *kabob* had come, a huge piece of bread doubled over pieces of meat and flavourings, which had been fixed on a skewer and grilled over charcoal. Each one broke off a piece of bread and used it to pick up a piece of meat. You ate as you wanted, there was enough for all; but if you stopped eating the hostess waved a hand. '*Baiformoid*', she said, using that polite Persian expression which is an epitome of friendly service.

The Persian repeated a long poem of Hafiz, in the curious rhythmic sing-song which may be either pleasant or annoying. Line after line, there was the same ending; you waited for it, expectant, it was something certain in this changing world. Finally, learned and ignorant, we all joined in that final syllable.

There followed a discussion of the meaning, for we all knew the poem in our respective languages—might it be enjoyed as a delightful picture of intense human passions or was it necessary to find a mystic meaning in every line? Some wanted one, some the other, but the Irish-

woman said that real mysticism was only to be found in man-and-woman's love.

We stopped talking, for a bulbul was singing, sitting on a vine above the bushes fragrant with *gul-i-surkh*.

'You see', whispered the Persian, 'the bulbul only sings near a rose'.

The Persian nightingale is softer than ours but not so sweet. The only sound we made was wine being poured into glasses and an occasional faint clink.

The moon rose higher and lighted all the house, making the flower-pots around the pool cast long shadows, faintly lighting up a big gold-fish. The bird sang on unendingly; the row of empty bottles grew; plate after plate of sandwiches and *kabobs* disappeared. We had forgotten the dinners that awaited us in our scattered homes. It was near midnight, but did it matter? We had had companionship, grave and gay; we had seen lovely colours and shapes; had drunk good wine, eaten good meat; smelt fragrant roses; heard a bird sing and felt the soft air touch our faces and our arms.

'*Droschas*, quick', and off the servants sped whilst our host gathered bright yellow rose-buds, sweet and delicious, for us to hold as our horses hurried on their way, the carriages swaying over the rough road.

Then it was that I saw the mountains dance, the mist play leap-frog on the hills, and all the constellations come to life.

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SHIRAZ TO ISPAHAN

THERE was nothing more that I could learn in Shiraz, for local fear and dislike of the English foreigner was strong just then and I had given up all hope of talking to some women I very much wanted to know. I decided to go on to Ispahan.

In Shiraz I learnt that there are for the travelling European two Persias; the small, understandable one inhabited by Europeans, and the big, incomprehensible and, at the moment, slightly antagonistic one inhabited by Persians. I tried to get into the latter, but often I was so confused and depressed that I would run away for shelter and rest in the former before I had courage to make another assault upon the semi-Eastern nation.

I hired a seat in a car, which, I was told, was very good, but actually went in one which should have been on a rubbish heap ten years ago.

We left at 4 a.m. on Wednesday, 10th May, and reached Ispahan, only 300 miles away, at 1 a.m. the next morning. Persians say they are clever. I believe it, or we should never have got there at all. Most of the body was tied together with cord, whilst protruding nails and wire made it so like a hedgehog that when we arrived I was black and blue all over, and in places my stockings and clothes were torn or worn into small holes. The radiator leaked and a string was fastened to something in the bonnet and held tight by a mechanic who rode outside all the way. Instead of four passengers the car had seven. Nine-tenths of the running boards were covered with luggage, a huge bundle made of thick carpet on which the mechanic balanced, and all those mysterious-shaped parcels used by people who are not European.

Although I had hired one seat in the car and space for my luggage, I got a quarter of a seat and my bags had to follow. Nearly all the distance is desert, not bare sand, but sand having, at intervals, grey-green scrubby plants, each fighting for its small allowance of moisture. In the early morning and at sunset, when the slanting light gives them a soft brilliance and casts deep shadows, these independent and individual plants are attractive, but during the heat of the day they are dull and depressing. Here and there were flowers, breaking the monotony, giving hope, they opened at five and were dead at seven, their life from bud to seed two days, ten days—no more—an orgy of inflorescence. We passed small villages, each with a few fields of brilliant green.

The other passengers were a rich Persian woman, her son of seventeen and their male and female servants, both such shrivelled and aged persons that they should have been in the peaceful shelter of an almshouse instead of waiting on those two pampered creatures. We stopped *en route* to visit Persepolis, a flying visit of twenty minutes, when I realized that Persepolis is a place where trippers go, the nationalists rejoice, but only the archaeologists work.

'You have no Persepolis in England?' these ignorant people asked.

'No, nothing nearly as old.'

'Ah!'

Oh, that 'Ah'. It swelled them up so much that there was hardly room for me in the car. If they hadn't pushed me so furiously on to the tacks I might have imagined I was looking at a play called the 'Dusty Road to Ispahan', or call it golden if you like, for dust can be a marvellous colour in glorious Persian sunlight when it is somebody else's and at a non-inhaling distance!

The mother was taking her son to be educated in Beyrout, where she

would have the happiness of throwing away her *chadar* and her *piché*. She pretended to tear the latter in half and throw the former out of the car although made of beautiful *crêpe de chine*. It is easy to throw away a garment, but would she also get rid of the nerves which made much of the twenty-two hours journey a burden to herself and me. She had, like many Persian women, enormously thick legs, locally admired, but her feet were compressed into small red shoes. Luggage was under and above our feet, so she took off her shoes and spread her feet on top of the leather bag which contained her food. Her son did not take off his shoes, but hung his feet over the door to cool. But, on the whole, she had charming manners, until we had lunch together at the disgusting little wayside tea-house. The owner swept out one of the rooms, for at a tea-house each party takes one room, sprinkled water to lay the dust and give that pleasant feeling to the air which in an arid country can honestly be called wonderful and placed a carpet on a wide bench. I hung over the side, just like a European, but she seated herself cross-legged on the bench and the meal began. Fingers, thumbs and forks all attacked their chicken and bits were handed to me, which I realized I must accept or be rude. But the noise of eating! and the way they both mauled that chicken and turned the bread upside down to choose special bits. The mother had a headache, at intervals looked tragic and took tablets, some German, some French. Frequently, during the morning, when she imagined no one was looking, she had been taking little brown bits from a tied-up corner of her handkerchief. When the meal was finished, the chicken bones, onion skin and orange peel having been dropped upon the floor, the maid poured water from a teapot, there being no proper apparatus, upon the hands of both, expensive French soap appeared and the toilet ended by the mother washing her mouth and spitting on the floor. The headache now being worse, the maid washed her face, put pieces of ice (carried in a special thermos flask) on her forehead, combed her bobbed hair, covered her with the *chadar* to keep off the flies and she condescended to sleep.

The family having finished what they wanted, the food was carried away by the servants to the car, where I found them using my typewriter case as a table, spilling tea and curdled milk on it without a blush.

At last, we were off again, but that headache was such that the mother required three-quarters instead of only one half of the seat. The son was very kind and devoted, supporting her head, stroking her hand and protecting her from the sun. Everywhere in Persia I noticed that grown-up sons were charming, unselfish and devoted to their mothers.



Karind : a typical mountain village.

Whenever we stopped for tea for the men, or water for the car, beggars appeared and the mother handed out *shis*. Beggars rather than the workhouse fit into the Islamic scheme, for donations to the poor are laid-up investments, no doubt at compound interest, for paradise. As one man said naively, 'If we paid for a workhouse for the poor how would Allah know how to apportion what we each gave?'

About half-past three, as always in Persia, the world became so beautiful that fatigue was almost forgotten. I was so hypnotized by the beauty of the light and colour that merely to exist was sufficient.

Hour after hour we had seen real desert, but towards sunset we passed by miles of deserted farms, gardens and houses. There were the furrows, ridges and ditches that men had made, so laboriously, but now the land was becoming again dry, useless, growing desert plants instead of wheat, cucumbers and spinach. Villages made of mud were slowly, in this dry climate, becoming mud again. Springs had evidently dried up, so man had been compelled to move on. Here man has an abundance of sun and fertile soil, but his struggle is for water.

The mother groaned and made noises that could only have been curses, but not for many minutes did she forget to call upon Khudah. As the radiator hole got bigger and we had to stop oftener, her complaints of that car grew louder. However, that was nothing to the late-at-night puncture, when the servants and the son had to produce pills, ice and kisses to prevent her going quite mad.

They decided, collectively, that it really was not safe to mend the picture in the desert, so we ran on the rim to the next station of the blue-coated road guards who lived in an old caravanserai turned into a military station. The space formerly used by the animals was now a garden and most of the travellers' rooms were empty, for there were only four soldiers, one asleep, one smoking, one making tea, and one drunk. The woman-servant asked the soldiers to bring out a carpet for the ladies and we camped on the front step. The mother lay down groaning, while the little old wizened servant pulled up her dress, pulled down her stockings and massaged those elephantine legs.

Was it picturesque or funny? A full moon made the world gloriously bright, made the fantastic mountains stand clear and high, not flat, but full of sharp shadows and sharp lights. The front of the caravanserai was in darkness but high above the door hung a tiny lamp, a poor apology for a light on that brilliant night. Through the pointed archway shone the leaves of the orange trees, and beyond, more arches led into the now empty rooms. There was a faint smell of watered earth

instead of the acrid smell of donkeys, the very acrid smell of camels, and there was silence. As the mother lay upon the carpet, groaning faintly, she motioned me to sit near her as I ate my chicken, bread and oranges. Afterwards I walked up and down the road but never went far before they called me back. A man appeared out of nowhere and lay down in a recess of the porch, but everyone became agitated until a guard came, and chased him away with the end of his bayonet.

The spare was nearly on when the mechanic got annoyed with the wheel, hammered where he should have persuaded and—there we were in the soup, possibly till dawn. We settled to sleep, the mother's head on her money-bag and mine on the carcass of the chicken. The son walked round and round the car, the moon shining on his aquiline nose, until, in my stupefied condition, I feared the car might go to pieces like Jericho before the perambulations of the Jews.

Fortunately the night being bright, there were lorries on the road, so after a convoy had collected, and eleven men had crawled under the car, the damage was put right and off we went.

In spite of aches and pains it was impossible not to enjoy the wonder of the night, of the long series of fantastic mountains to which the moon gave a thousand unimagined colours. The last hours sped by and suddenly ahead of us lay a great forest, trees and trees, all rich and growing; the desert was ended, the journey was ended and we were in Ispahan. The dome of a mosque caught a moonbeam, outshining the electric lights.

Ispahan is said to be the city of beautiful mosques, but I shall always think of it as the city of beautiful trees.

ISPAHAN

PEOPLE from all nations come to Ispahan to see mosques, but the most common objects are mullahs and trees, and the nicest are trees. Visiting the mosques is so complicated. First a guide (rather expensive), a plain clothes policeman (a fee), carriages (the price depending on the honesty of the guide), and dirty men, varying in number from one to six, who turn up at the door of each building as you are leaving and demand a tip equivalent to several days' wages. And at some of the extra-special mosques, an ordinary policeman comes along to protect the plain clothes man. It was maddening at first, but after an hour I just pretended those three men were not with me, and perhaps they weren't, for we lived in different worlds. I have learnt since, but unfortunately did not know at the time, that they were all watching to see that I did not steal any tiles. A famous American archaeologist has recently been visiting Ispahan and there is open talk that, having obtained permission to see the old buildings, he walked away with bits, but many Persians cannot be persuaded that such behaviour is utterly impossible. They know the second-hand dealers have tiles and carvings whose original location is well known, so they are ready to think any interested foreigner has equally acquisitive habits.

The beauty of the tiles of the mosques is greater than any *English* description, but it is impossible to forget entirely the dirt, dilapidation and the great number of very poor beggars who are sleeping or praying in the courtyards.

Only in the mosque of Sheikh Lotfollah, which has never been allowed to fall seriously into disrepair and where the desert dust does not cling to the tiles, dimming their blue, can the beauty be enjoyed undisturbed. The lattice-like windows, made of tiles fitted together in simple or intricate designs, let in a gentle light and let in the doves, which, all over Persia, are symbols of the eternal spirit of man. In that great dim space where the air itself seemed to be a cool, clean blue, and the cooing of the birds echoed faintly, the origin of Islamic mysticism became comprehensible.

At the Shah Mosque, the most startling, the most famous and in the most impressive situation at the end of the Great-Shah Square, I met the architect, the builder and a number of men from the department of education, in order to see the repairs to the four lovely minarets which were beginning to fall outwards. We climbed up the stairs and saw Ispahan at our feet, brown houses, green trees, the green productive plain encircled by the bare, marvellously-coloured mountains. They produce nothing, but it is they who gather the snows and water that make Ispahan possible.

In order to see the repairs better they said I might walk up the dome. Did they think I was a cat? I tried, slipped badly, and imagined myself away below among the people who looked smaller than flies. I saw one of the men smiling a little triumphantly, thinking, no doubt, that I was just another inferior female. So I took off my shoes and threw them to him. 'Hold them please', but in my mind was a painful consideration, 'Oh dear, I'll have a lot of holes in my stockings after this'. As I made my way upwards a kind workman threw down a rope which seemed as thick as a string, but it soon helped me to the top.

How fine the tiles were, how beautifully and cleverly fitted together, to make the dome which is like a lovely flower. Time seems to have been helpless before the glaze. Down in the mosque the marble had become worn, dull, shabby, but here at the top of Ispahan each tile was shiningly fresh. I dodged to escape a flying pigeon and the workman grabbed my hand. It was certainly a long way down to the ground but the pigeons were flying far, far above our heads. I hoped the workman knew how grateful I was and that he'd not have to do too many ceremonial washings to get rid of my Christian uncleanness.

Great iron ropes and iron bands are to hold the minarets in place and keep the fine building together for a few more hundred years. Men were busy replacing fallen tiles, by old ones when possible, but mostly by excellent copies of the originals, made in Ispahan.

It was a pity to go down, for each moment the world was becoming more beautiful, as the sun caught and glorified the thin haze that hung over the city, but my hosts were anxious to have me safe. Holding on the rope, I backed down that awful dome and in a few minutes was with the men, who were gravely holding my shoes, admiring the English workmanship.

But the less known Masjid-i-Jameh is far more interesting and fascinating and so immense that it surely could have held the whole popula-

tion of Ispahan. The name means the Mosque of the Congregation, but, by a mistake, it is known as the Friday Mosque.

It was begun about 700 A.D., but unless a great many repairs can be made, its long life must be nearing an end. Its courtyard, dominated not by blue, but by yellow tiles, seems much simpler and less solid than any of the other mosques, but it is the brick-work which is the glory of Jameh. The apparently innumerable domes have an amazing variety of designs, made by ingenious arrangements of the reddish and greenish bricks. The bricks also have little designs pressed into them, especially in the Gombedeh Khaky, the dome-room, the gem of the whole building. Smoke was rising behind a tumbled wall, because a rich man was, as an act of grace, having a free meal prepared for the poor. He was building up their bodies, but at the same time helping to destroy Jameh.

Amidst all this impending ruin, the stucco *mihrab* of Sultan Uljaitu of 1310 had been repaired, but its intertwining vines and lotus flowers seemed too rich, too beautiful to lead the thoughts of the suppliants to all the austerities and negations of Mecca. Will the domes fall, leaving the repaired *mihrab* standing?

Out of the mosque we went into the streets of Ispahan, that city where one is constantly being raised to ecstasy one moment and then dropped with a painful bump to the revolting. Most of the streets are dirty in spite of being swept with leafy lilac branches, and so irregular that you walk with eyes fixed on the ground, then you go into the garden of the Chihil Sutun, see the twenty lovely columns climbing to the gay roof, see those columns reflected cooling in the clear water, and forget everything, from the bad eggs at breakfast to a tumble in a disgusting city gutter, where a woman had dammed up the water with mud from the road and in the resulting little reservoir was washing dishes, her clothes and her lettuces.

The two palaces of Shah Abbas, the Ali Kepi and the Chihil Sutun, every inch of which are decorated, were covered with plaster, fifty years ago, by Sultan Jeleh of Ispahan, who is said to have wished to destroy all the work of Shah Abbas. Very few Persian rulers have had a generous appreciation of the work of their predecessors. The plaster is now being removed, revealing both beauty and ugliness; in one room the restorer has put the most appalling plaques of modern coloured, high-relief plaster flowers above some very interesting paintings which show the Chinese influence of the time of Shah Abbas.

Persia is, fortunately, beginning to realize the value and beauty of her past arts and crafts but her taste in modern things is bourgeois. Perhaps

she will have to re-absorb the old before she can create or understand anything worth while. Her own domestic architecture is straightforward, simple and dignified, the wood-work good, the proportions of the rooms excellent, but when there is enough money to burst forth into twists and curls, into Renaissance capitals and plaques, replete with over-fed roses and gross bulbuls, the result is pathetic.

Ispahan does more craft work in silver, brass, copper, lacquer and the manufacture of *kalemkars* than any other city in Persia. Much of the work is really good, as long as it keeps faithfully to the old traditions. Carpet-making is being revived, stitch by stitch, following the old technique and designs, but carpets with atrocious designs are produced, chiefly, it is said, for the Egyptian market. I've had to admire a carpet which gave a pictorial representation of a feast of Cyrus, who was dining on a Wedgware service, whilst the border contained painful representations of the world's philosophers.

The exquisite brocades of three hundred years ago are no longer made, as their price would be prohibitive, even with the low cost of Persian labour, but good brocades are being produced at a Craft School in Tehran.

A large part of this work is done in the bazaars, two of which, distinguished by their fine vaults, were made by the great Shah. These covered narrow streets, making a busy labyrinthine city within the city, are the centre of the commercial life, and, to many visitors, the most continuously interesting part of Ispahan. There, as never in the West, the very heart of industry is laid bare: the skins that make your shoes hang, almost alive, upon the walls; you hear how many taps it takes to make a jug; see how much handling is necessary for a vase, stirring to prepare a sweetmeat, stitches to mend a carpet, care to cook a *kabob*. In the West the shops are full of detached, non-human products, but in the bazaar everything, except the fruit and vegetables, is intimately allied to a particular man. The difference is immense, exciting, but whether the result is happy or sad depends upon the point of view. These people work so hard: some are there at half-past six and some are still working at nine at night, some are very young, but few are very old.

The bazaars are always what is called picturesque; there are chiaroscuro effects that are marvellous. In a dark room off the main bazaar men were making pottery: an old man at one wheel was deeply absorbed but not very clever, for he had to remake the top time after time. Next him sat a younger man, quickly and gracefully moulding vase

after vase, in the light of a brilliant sunbeam which, coming through a hole in the roof, separated him abruptly from the darkness, him and a bright peacock-blue bowl in which he periodically dipped his fingers.

In darkness men are dyeing wool in indigo, in semi-darkness children are mending carpets, in obscure corners tiny boys, little more than babies, are blowing on to the recalcitrant charcoal which is the only fire in all these miles of little shops. There is darkness in the bazaars, there are smells, the sight of men's eyes grows dim, the dusty, dirty air gets into their lungs and they die young, little children develop tuberculosis, many have eye diseases as well as blindness. The bazaar is picturesque but it would be better if it were as clean and as beautiful as it might be.

The Persian is amused, and rightly, that the European should be surprised that they prefer open streets, although they are quite unsuitable in such a climate unless they can be supplied with plenty of awnings to give coolness and dim light, both for those who buy and those who sell. Our arcades are the Western edition of the bazaars, but we, with all our opportunities, have not made them beautiful.

In the bazaar is man the craftsman, not man the factory worker. It sounds good, but far better is the modern factory than these dark stuffy places, far better is the certainty of a weekly wage than the tragedy of such fierce competition. Little room after little room hold men who are doing the same work, making the same stitches in leather, inhaling the same clouds of fine wool threads, the same dust from the earth that the potter makes into vessels, the same evil fumes from the dye-pots, deafened by the same noise of hammer on copper, brass and silver.

As I walked through the section of the metal workers, all the sounds united to make a rhythmic march and I found myself walking to an unknown, insistent music. I was not in Bushire, Shiraz, Ispahan, Hamadan or any part of Persia, but in some mighty universal workshop, which had neither time nor place, where Stone-Age man was busy, and modern man, and man in the future. I felt man so tired, so bent, in the past, in the present. But some day we will surely work in light, beauty, cleanliness and freedom. That music had made me a prisoner. I had to leave the bazaar to be free.

Perhaps the Shah will some day make the bazaars what they should be. Animals ought not to be allowed in them or human beings who behave like animals. One day a wild man on a wild horse, his bell ringing madly, made a dash along the narrow ways, everyone moved quickly

to the side, but he trod on some miserable chickens that an old man was selling, the children cried and some fell, there was general disorder, but no one stopped the rider, for the one policeman was busy bargaining with a veiled woman in a corner.

At frequent intervals there are food shops. The white curds, rice boiled in milk or bright curry soup looks attractive in the peacock bowls of Isfahan, the greenish bowls of Shiraz or the aluminium ones of Bushire, but the dust of the road, of the people, of animals rises up and settles down on the food. There is a great deal of illness, most children are born only to die. Education comes slowly, and there is a too general belief that the magic sun cures all evils. That is a tenacious national belief quite regardless of the facts.

The bazaar arches at Isfahan are beautiful but what is underneath? It is like a splendid mountain valley where peasants live in terrible slums. I remembered the sun at Zermatt and the crowded darkness in which the peasants lived.

There are people who are content to pass by the unhappiness. I watched the lovely sunlight pour down in a circular ray and light up a little boy sitting asleep, his face upon his knees, his clothes rags; he was unbearably thin and white, insects crawled on his neck. He was resting a little time from bellows blowing, for which he received half a kran a day, enough to buy a little bread, a few leaves of mint, a small piece of cheese. He began work at six in the morning and ended at eight o'clock at night.

That was a wonderful study in colour, that was a terrible study in life.

I sat all the morning with the artists who drew designs on vases and tiles. They brought me a little stool that I might not get tired and offered cigarettes. I learnt that they were well paid, and as they worked near a door that opened into a courtyard, their conditions were not too unhealthy. In the courtyard a very old man with a henna beard was laying out dyed materials for the colour to ripen in the sun and there a mulberry tree struggled to live. The artists rejoiced in its green leaves.

Towards lunch-time one of them brought out a piece of paper from his pocket covered with somewhat indecent drawings, which he had made. 'That is what you prefer in Europe?' he questioned. His point of view was like that of a Persian who said 'I have graduated from Montmartre, so am in a position to associate with Europeans'.

I do not know any more delightful experience than to order one of these craftsmen to make something. You enter into a partnership, you

become friends, you walk along to see how the earrings or the tray are progressing, you discuss each detail, all the neighbouring craftsmen help too. A temporary club springs up for a short time.

Most of the streets in Ispahan are narrow and treeless, the high mud walls making one feel imprisoned, hunted, but over many of the walls innumerable tall, thin, pollarded *chenah* trees stretch upwards, turning gardens into miniature forests, where there is quivering shade on the hottest days, for Ispahan can be very hot in summer as well as cold in winter. Summer is alleviated by ice, which is stored in immense quantities in pits in the ground. Every shop has a turquoise bowl containing a block of ice, on which in May one or more pink Persian roses lie, in order to prolong, for a few hours, their very short life.

Beyond the green Ispahan plain is desert and then rise mountains, detached, strange in shape, but always beautiful in colour; when it is clear, apparently near even when they are really far. Ispahan is richer in water than most Persian cities, so the water-tax is unusually low and the main streets are watered every day. Through the plain goes the Zayendah river, crossed by twelve bridges, most of them fine, sometimes wide, sometimes narrow, but the river is always a place to bathe, to wash motor cars, to have picnics. The river is flowing water, the loveliest possession of a dry land.

Ispahan has one of the finest streets in Persia, the Chahar Bagh, with its three roadways separated by double rows of planes and silver poplars, which grow so tall and fine, because kept always fresh by water running at their roots. The middle way is for pedestrians; early in the morning in May come the peasants pushing donkeys loaded with cucumbers, on their heads huge trays piled high with white mulberries, at the top a pink rose, or carrying turquoise bowls of curdled milk; in the summer there are melons and egg-plants, and in the autumn, grapes. Few people are to be seen there during the day, but in the late afternoon the avenue is a dense mass of men and women. All of the Moslem women wear their black *chadars*, their faces covered, but that evening walk is the most exciting adventure in the day and the little part of an eye which does look out, sees everything. The men try to see what they can of the woman and sometimes succeed very well. The most aristocratic women do not go for a walk but see the world from a carriage.

On this avenue is the beautiful Madressah Chahar Bagh, which, until March, 1933, was a very important religious school, where a hundred students came at fourteen and remained ten years in order to

become mullahs. They have now been sent away to a number of small schools, in order, it is said, that it may become a national historical monument, but one man explained, 'You see the Shah wants to keep it all clean'! Its great door, covered with silver gilt, partly stolen, opens into a pleasant garden where there are some magnificent trees. Around the garden are three alcoves, brilliant with tiles, one of them used as the school mosque. As I went in, a Sayid, in his long coat, green waist-band and green turban, was posing for his photograph, pretending to smoke a *kalyon*. At the side of the alcove, ostrich feathers were fixed in poles, just like those in old pictures of the Queen of Sheba, but here they were not for rejoicing but for the sorrows of Muharram. In the next alcove were seven large trays waiting for a mixture of rice and vegetables, which were a religious gift made by a rich man to the local Sayids. What was left would go to the beggars.

In the corner courtyard, some masons were busy fitting old tiles together, to be used for the reconstruction of the minarets, and, just behind, a group of enterprising boys were also collecting old tiles and throwing them against the wall, laughing as they broke and fell!

The school has 150 apartments, each for two students, which consist of a large outer and a small inner room, where there is an open fire-place for heating and cooking. The only fact which seriously interested the attendant was that there had formerly been 444 doors! Persians are not wasteful, so they probably have not been burnt but are being used somewhere in the neighbourhood.

The alcoves of the school are now put to modern use, for they have become examination halls, the students squatting on the floor, a suitable distance apart. A capable man pointed to the boys and said, 'The mullahs have gone and in their place sits a generation who will make Persia not a religious, but a practical country'.

Ispahan is still one of the most conservative cities in Persia, for every-one of its women is compelled to wear a *chadar*, dancing is not allowed, and its mullahs, although 10,000 four years ago, now only 1,000, still retain a great influence, but the story of the Madressah Chahar Bagh shows which way the wind blows.

When the Moslem Sabbath begins, on Thursday night, there is, especially when the moon is high, a great exodus from the town to the cemetery. It is not a sad or grave procession, for the rich dash along in cars, followed close by men and women in buses and carriages. Others go on bicycles, singing as they go, some walk, stopping to dance, play a flute, a mouth organ. Even the prostitutes go. One woman always

advertised her wares by singing loudly, and periodically exposing her gay dress as her *drosha* moved along slowly.

They start at sundown and continue till very late, some returning after a few hours, others remaining all the night. It is a mixture of a social function and a religious duty; for the women, it is something to break the deadly monotony of their lives, so possibly it will be less popular when there is more social life, more mixing of men and women. A night spent out among the dead has some of the value of a pilgrimage to Mecca, Kebella, Qum or Meshed, thus those who cannot make the big journeys can accumulate virtue locally.

The cemetery can be seen far away, for there are many domes, one covered with the loveliest turquoise blue tiles in Ispahan. The domes belong to the numerous 'supports', those curious caravanserais of the dead where the richer families bury their relations in rooms like those in which they lived when on earth. The tomb is low on the floor, covered with a cloth and surrounded with carpets. On the tombstone are vases of flowers, simple lamps, vast erections of glass and crystal pendants, in which candles are burnt, but sometimes there is just a bowl of water, a symbol of the water which Hazrat Abbas brought to Kerballa at the cost of his life. In the centre is always a plate, on it a bowl, often beautiful, and in that a fine glass ewer containing rose-water, and at the end of the tomb is a little stand covered with a fine brocade (or carpet), to support the Koran. The windows around the room are curtained and on the walls hang paintings and photographs of the dead. The relations come to sit in this room, say a prayer, hear the Koran, smoke, drink tea. They are paying a call on the dead, who are not dead, they are helping his soul and also their own. Some families have two rooms, one on the ground floor of the tomb and one above, where they have meals and rest during the vigil, which may last for twenty-four hours.

The peasants of all countries, and nearly everyone in Persia, accept death as an integral part of life. Peasants are so wise because primitive, for living near to the fields, seeing the succession of the seasons, they are acutely aware of creativeness. The Persian has perhaps found it even easier to reach the same end by the addition of the fatalistic teaching of Mahomet. Christianity has held out, quite unsuccessfully, the delights of heaven as an inducement to smile at death. Mahomet has inculcated the passive acceptance of everything from birth to death, so the Moslem shrugs his shoulders and goes into the unknown with amazing calm, and, without distress or repulsion, uses the cemetery as his playground.

But how complicated mourning is. As the corpse leaves the house, *halva* (a sweetmeat) is distributed to the poor, in order that the savage dogs which menace the passage of the soul may be kept quiet. As guests arrive to assist at the ceremony, they are sprinkled with rose-water to suggest the beauty and kindliness of the dead and each is presented with a tiny cup of strong unsweetened coffee, which is put on their lips with their fingers, that they too may taste the bitterness of death. The men and women separate into different rooms, each having three professional mourners of their own sex. They sit at one side of the room, in front of them a Koran covered with a cloth and surrounded by vases of flowers. The garments of the dead are shown to the visitors who weep and mourn but, as they are no longer of use, they are torn and cast aside. For a young woman there is also a tray with sweets, henna and mirrors, which are scattered about the room.

The mourners beat themselves on breasts and legs, making great cries. The women bring out a huge handkerchief, cover themselves entirely in their *chadars*, groan, cry inordinately and produce real tears. The room almost vibrates with emotion. I, like the few other foreigners who have been present, recognized that it was stupidly artificial, but the atmosphere was so tense that it was impossible not to weep too.

For quarter of an hour this goes on and then—ceases suddenly, when the women emerge from their *chadars* and the usual conversation about clothes, children and servants begins. After a pleasant interlude of ten minutes, mourning recommences. Eight hours a day, for three days, the men and women continue until they are completely exhausted. At the end of a week someone goes to the cemetery, leans over the grave and asks if the dead are happy. When the answer comes back that all is well, the family can return to its usual life.

Many of the 'supports' are built round the tomb of some man famous for his virtue, for the dead wish to be as near as possible to the saintly. In this central tomb one or more lights frequently burn day and night, the cost being paid by an original endowment or the subsequent gift of a pious rich man. There are graves so close to the central tomb that one has to walk over them. The rich have built room after room, until the original tomb is entirely surrounded; they are in different styles, in different degrees of splendour. A mullah is generally in charge of each 'support' and conducts the prayers on Thursday night and during Friday. Those who are too poor to have a room sit outside by the graves of their dead, hiring men to say parts of the Koran or pressing into the 'support' when the hours of prayer are sounded.

On the platform around the main tomb, women are crowded together at one side, making tea with the samovars which they have brought from the town, smoking the *kalyon*, nursing their babies, at intervals weeping bitterly and beating their most unfortunate chests. Fortunately they have largely given up beating their *breasts*.

On Thursday night also, families periodically make a gift to the poor, of great slabs of bread which is folded over a mixture of sugar and nuts or of various cakes and sweets. This giving of food to the poor is the ten per cent. alms enjoined by the Prophet and is the institution which has kept mendicity so flourishing. Some families give money every week, others specially on the anniversary of a death.

It is not suitable for a foreigner to go to the cemetery either alone, or even accompanied by a Persian, when the services are in full swing, as some of the ignorant and fanatical might consider that he or she (and specially she) might bring impurity, with bad luck in this world and increased difficulties in the next; but early in the evening plenty of people will invite the foreigner into the tomb rooms, and as a sign of friendliness pour rose-water over their hands.

In one room I was asked to sit down, given a cigarette and tea. It contained one tomb with immense and very elaborate candelabra, many flowers and an exquisite glass rose-water ewer. On the wall at the head of the tomb hung an oil painting of a very handsome young man and on the other walls enlargements of photographs taken at various ages. A mullah, dressed in the long white flowing coat which is so graceful, over which was laid a fine beige-coloured *abba*, and wearing the traditional embroidered skull cap, was sitting at the end of the tomb, reading a few lines here and there from a book of prayer. He started each sentence clearly but it gradually faded away to nothing, just as so often happens in a Roman Catholic church. When we came in he stood up and bowed, his expression pleasant and friendly. At intervals, while we remained, he stopped his prayers, making a few remarks or asking questions. The dead and living were near, possibly the spirit of the dead man was in the room too. Everyone behaved simply and naturally. At the other end of the tomb sat two relations, a man telling his beads, a boy sitting motionless by his side. Two family servants sat near one door and one stood at the other, for they had to distribute the great stack of bread and sweets which were on a tray placed near the tomb. We squatted on the beautiful carpet, that had had the centre cut out that it might fit around the tomb. As we rose to leave they invited us to stay the night and be their guests at supper, which

would be served on the verandah outside. A servant came with us, holding a lamp to guide us down the irregular steps and over the broken paving-stones of the courtyard, where trees were growing and flowers shone in the dim light.

That room was particularly interesting for it represented the romance and the tragedy of a young and handsome man of a great Bakhtiari family who fell in love with a Tehran woman who had consumption. Now he lies under the heavy stone in the room which is like his own home, where there is even a fire-place to cheer him during the long winter and where his relations weep that he had lived only thirty-two years.

In the cemetery there is a great water-tank, *ab-anbar*, given by a pious man so that all may have to drink. Like so much Persian architectural work it is made of fine arches and beautiful vaults. Not far away is a tea-house where the men, and men only, may sit talking as they drink and smoke. Here, as everywhere in Persia, I felt the desolation of men and women being so separated; no wonder so many men become vicious, no wonder the women try to satisfy their thwarted emotions in an orgy of religious excess. And the man with whom I walked in the cemetery felt desolate too.

Just after sunset the cemetery had been very picturesque, the yellow light making the tombstones and the minarets so glowingly beautiful that death seemed impossible, and the groans and wails of the mourners quite out of place. All around the horizon the isolated mountains stood up, rugged, bare, magnificent. People, cars and carriages made the cemetery dusty, but above us the sky, a complete hemisphere, became more intensely clear and brilliant as day passed into night.

As we walked back to the city we passed many people bound for the cemetery, but everyone had not left Ispahan, for the Chahar Bagh Avenue was full of men and women, and on the other side of the city religious enthusiasts were visiting the newly-found tomb of Zeinabie, the sister of Imam Reza, who is buried at Meshed. In the Moslem world, as in Europe, there are fashions in saints, the latest often being the most attractive.

This tomb had been located, some said by the dream of a mullah, while others contended that a record of it had been found in an old manuscript in the sacred city of Qum. The discovery had at once been telegraphed to Meshed, whose chief mullah had sent on the good news to every city in Persia. It is not easy for a woman to be a saint in the Moslem world, but if your brother happens to have been an Imam, grace descends upon you automatically and your place of burial be-

comes yet another spot where sorrowing, troubled women may find peace and hope.

A bus service was immediately started to take the devoted and their candles out to the tomb, for Persians, as business men, are rapidly developing punch. But a practical mullah said, 'No more candles please; let each suppliant bring a brick so that we may build something worthy of Zeinabie'. There must have been great bitterness between the candle- and the brick-makers, and I quite expected to see the Chahar Bagh with two new advertisements—'Buy more candles', 'Carry more bricks', to mar its beauty.

At present fanaticism at the tomb is excessive, religious zeal leads to a good many fights and particularly to the exclusion of the unclean foreigner. The devout even object to the presence of Persians who are believed not to be quite orthodox, and they may explain their objection by sticks and stones and female shoes (a most unpleasant weapon).

The Government has done much to discourage, even to suppress, fanaticism, but it went too far and in August, 1933, the policy had to be modified. The present Government keeps its finger on the popular pulse and is always ready to go backwards, when to go forward might endanger the stability of the present Shah.

And yet, in Ispahan, one of the most famous cities of the East, a city of romance, of lovely mosques, I was waked by a factory hooter every day at 5 a.m.

Many Ispahanese want you to know more about the hooter than the mosques. They know that their mosques are beautiful but that hooter means plenty of cheap cloth and clothes, all made at home, of home-grown wool and cotton; the hooter is the beginning of a successful, modernized, self-supporting Persia. Romance is in just that whistle if you can hear it in the right way.

It was to make me understand this point of view that I was visited by a charming local editor, who was educated, cultured, a lover of old Persia, a dreamer about new Persia, a man who is, I am convinced, desirous of giving himself for the good of his city and his country. He knows the future will be a success, not as a result of flag-waving and self-complacency but because some of the young people are going to study hard and live decently. On and on he talked, until Persia became a live country, as well as a place where there are architectural gems and curious habits.

When the moon began to rise behind the trees of the avenue we sat out on the verandah, drinking cherry sherbet, while he told of what

Ispahan would be in ten years, its clean modern factories well out of the town, its schools with universal education, its houses with water laid on so that the poor need not wash their clothes and their lettuces in the dirty street-ditches, the mosques mended, the road metalled, the women uncovered and free.

'You must come back then, to see what our Shah has done, what he has inspired us to do.'

He stood up and bowed gracefully, taking my hand in both of his. His steps echoed as he went down the long wooden staircase, and I crawled under the mosquito net which was luminous with the moon, thinking I was learning a great deal and then suddenly feeling as if I were skimming along the surface, not knowing whether there was a box of bon-bons or a volcano underneath.

The street was quiet. No, not quite, for a long line of camels, loaded with cotton, padded silently by, their bells swaying musically. They passed on, inevitably, as if they had been moving slowly, undulatingly and silently since the world began and would go on until its end.

I had better sleep, for in six hours the factory hooter would wake me again.

Persia! A hooter at the beginning of the day, a camel caravan at the end. That, the months taught me, is her history, her problems, her past and her future.

• 2 •

PHILOSOPHY ON THE FLOOR

IT was difficult for certain Persians to call upon me at the hotel, for gossip flourishes even better in Persia than in England; it was unpleasantly dusty and noisy on my verandah, they could not ask me to their houses, so we decided to have a day in the country.

At six a.m. a bright-eyed boy of nineteen, wearing blue shorts and a white shirt, knocked at my door. We were to walk seven miles to the village to meet a local poet who was also an agriculturist. It was a lovely morning, as mornings are on the Persian plateau for seven months of the year, and, being the Moslem Sunday, we went down the splendid Chahar Bagh Avenue without meeting anyone. At the end we saw a dead camel, knocked down late the night before by a car. It was symbolic of what happens, too often, when East and West meet. But the boy and I were friends before the day had ended.

We crossed the Chahar Bagh bridge, admiring the views of river and mountain which were framed by each of the long series of beautiful arches.

We talked of nationalism, that force which is changing the mind and life of Persia. He was enthusiastic, believing it to be a great creative idea which could never become so aggressive as to be a danger. How different from the point of view of an eminent man, 'We wish to be strong, we have learnt this narrow nationalism from England. After we have developed it, tried it out, we will try internationalism.'

We passed through a wood which was deliciously cool and moist; the boy thought, from his reading, that it might be like England. Wild *anchusa* grew there in abundance, beautiful and bright, but not as beautiful as the best cultivated English varieties: wild asparagus was there too, in great quantities, its thin green stalks being gathered by peasants to sell in the towns. Asparagus is not cultivated in Persia except by a very few English people. The wild variety has a pleasant taste, but is so small that it is a great labour to eat. I was astonished that he did not know the names of the birds and plants, he was astonished that I did. The city, in Persia, is emotionally, although not spatially, far from the country, and although the Persian is a devoted lover of flowers, it is cultivated flowers, and only a few of these, that make a special appeal to him. The herons were charming in the river, the Green Mantle was lovely on the wing, the morning was full of light.

When we reached the hard road some nails came through my soles, but we had to ask a great many peasants before we found one with a knife to rescue the foreigner, who must have been queer, because she walked instead of going in an automobile. The plants cultivated in the meticulously cared-for land were unknown to the boy, so we asked a young peasant with a very intelligent face to tell us their names. He told us how interested he was in his school work, how much he wanted to go away and learn to be a teacher.

'My father is poor, so I must be a farmer too. I can read, and say poetry, but I shall, nevertheless, become a farmer and I shall become a patriot; every boy must work to make Persia a great country.' He repeated, word for word, the passage in the school reader on nationalism, his voice becoming sing-song and his attitude artificial.

'But as you can read, you can be a better farmer than your father', I said.

He looked very doubtful, he thought of learning as something for town people but not for tillers of the earth. This separation of book-

learning from the practical is recognized as an educational mistake and an effort is being made not to copy the European error of turning peasants into 'black coats'. An English school in Kerman found that in acquiring book-learning, the girls adopted an attitude of scorn to anything domestic, but the wise head at once started lessons in cooking and housewifery, which were given not by a second-rate teacher, but by the best-educated woman in the school. 'It is absurd', said the girls, feeling a little insulted, but that wise woman finally won.

By eight a.m. I sought even the tiniest shadow and was glad when we reached the garden of the tea-house, where a writer and a doctor were waiting. They had come in a carriage, the former too busy, the latter too fat, to walk seven miles.

We sat on carpets, of course, under the shadow of apricots and vines, near yellow jasmine and rose-bushes, and the tea-house-man, old, with a bright red hennaed beard, brought us each a *gul-i-surkh*, that fragrant, pink, Persian rose that is said to be the original of all garden roses, but whose perfume is more delicious than anything in Europe. The men had brought bags of cakes and nuts which were eaten with the tea. Sponge-cakes make a very nourishing breakfast and pistachios are good at any time of the day.

They wanted to know about my visit to the hospital and what I thought of the new regulations for prostitutes, that every woman must be registered, carry a card with her photograph and a statement of the date when she was last admitted to, and discharged from, the hospital. There had been a rumour in the town that every sick woman was to be compelled to wear iron bracelets: amazing rumours take the place of correct information as the few newspapers are all well censored. These men blamed Europe for having brought venereal disease to Persia; at the moment they are inclined to think that every evil has come out of the West.

The doctor, who did not believe in innovations and industrialism, was very pathetic, being torn between the old and the new. 'I want neck-ties, I want electricity, I want cars and I also want our sleepy old ways, the day after today as convenient as today, no haste, no punctuality, no striving and no worry.'

When breakfast was finished, they each gave me a spray of yellow jasmine, which faded at once, but for the sake of friendliness, I held it tight in my cruelly-hot hand. I hoped the flowers were a little refreshed by the perspiration which dropped from my topee, as we walked along the hot road. We were welcomed in the wide village-street by the poet,

Mahendez Dashgerdi, a man with a kindly, humorous face who took us to his garden, that I might see cucumber plants being manured with that mixture of night soil and wood ashes which donkeys brought daily from the city, and which is of primary importance in agriculture throughout Persia. The people of Ispahan and the neighbourhood are said to be the best gardeners in Persia, and at one time there was a manure (*qibl*) market, the merchants having specimens in little pouches in a belt round their waist, the biggest price going for the manure from the Jewish quarter, because Jews ate the fattest! There are few horses and cows, there is no artificial manure, so the position is difficult. Whenever there are ruins, and they are almost everywhere, the farmer knocks down the old mud walls and puts them on the land, for there is a large quantity of straw or manure mixed with the mud.

The garden had many fruit trees and some wild flowers, whose names he knew. The white mulberries hung thick on the trees, the apricots grew whilst one looked at them, the yellow flower of the famous Ispahan melons made all their mouths water, the lovely blossoms of the pomegranate were like little fires.

Out of the fierce sun we went into the cool house, now only used for picnics, past the kitchen with its samovars and charcoal fires, a cupboard where a white rabbit and its huge family were fat and happy, and up the steep stairs on to a roof which led into a series of three rooms, one entirely papered with illustrations taken from French and English papers about 1880. The old owner had been so proud to put these marvels of Europe upon his walls! The end room had been prepared for us by covering the floor with carpets and putting two bolster-pillows in the alcoves. The three tall doors were opened to let in the warm soft wind, and we looked out through the tree-tops to the purple mountains on one side and to the garden, the village and a solitary rugged mountain on the other.

We all sat upon the floor, the four men quite at ease, but I rather uncomfortable and very soon stiff and numbed. What an odd collection we were; the poet who was a Moslem and a Sufist, the boy a Moslem with a deep sympathy for Christianity, the writer a Moslem trying to twist it into a religion fit for modern life, the doctor a Bahai, sure he was superior to the others because he held the last revelation, and I, a woman, a European and an agnostic. For an hour we discussed religion, its place in Persia, in the past, the present and the future. The boy said the modern Persian owed many of his better ideals to Christianity, the writer and the poet denied this, good-humouredly but firmly, the Bahai

declared that all the good of both, but not the bad of either, was included in Baháism.

A tall servant, barefoot, wearing marvellously-patched clothes, brought us tea, and then, as a great honour, some of the 'First Fruits', delicious little green cucumbers, a huge dish of white mulberries, small white cherries, and—a bunch of roses. The poet quoted a quatrain about the First Fruits and the charm of everything that was fresh, the new moon, spring flowers, every emotion experienced for the first time.

The cucumbers could be eaten because they had skins. I tasted one mulberry out of politeness, found it very insipid and washed the cherries in my tea. The latter seemed to them the act of one who dared not tackle life bravely, but they, a little scornfully, recognized that Europeans had weak insides and, realizing the danger, thought it would certainly be a pity if I died before my tour was completed. The poet noticed that I was having a struggle to keep my eyes open, so suggested that I should rest, and they all patted the pillow before disappearing to leave me to sleep on the floor.

I wandered about with European modesty trying to find a lavatory, but finally had to seek their aid. The poet had disappeared and the other three did not know the geography of the house. There followed a great search, up and down the stairs, in the house and in the garden. It was a sort of hunt the slipper!

I slept for an hour and then lunch appeared, a proper Persian lunch on the floor, mountains of rice, dozens of chickens, yards of bread, pints of curdled milk, dishes of fruit and more roses. I had a spoon and fork, but the others ate very nicely with bread and fingers. The doctor said he was suffering from indigestion and obesity, which the poet replied were a proper punishment for being a Bahai!

After lunch we started on an unending number of glasses of tea, cigarettes and philosophy, mixed with poetry. The poet was a Sufist but practical also, his poetry was in the old forms, *Rubáiyát*, the *Ghazal*, the *Ghazn*, but his ideas were alive, for the people of today, especially for the young people who are going to make the new Persia.

'Listen, my friends, because youth is the best time, because then only can you fully develop yourselves. Look at life, see that it is like a moving river, be quick, for the time is too short to learn all that is needed. Eat from the table of life joyfully but do not forget to give food to others, for know that the miser gets worry but no joy.'

It was about this place in the argument that the writer and the doctor,

having made themselves comfortable, fell fast asleep on the second cushion; there they lay side by side, the thin little writer with his keen intelligent face, the doctor with his rotund content.

The poet looked at them and laughed. 'Bahaism is no good, but we human beings are some good. We five are all different, we five are all the same. You have come so far to see Persia and understand Persians. You have walked seven miles along the roads that we may all talk together here freely. And you are a woman. I think you are what you are because Sufism was born 1200 or more years ago. You owe something to Persia and our women will some day owe much to you.'

The Bahai started, sat up, puffing. 'You scorn the Bahais, but what do they say—a bird cannot fly with only one wing, humanity cannot go upwards when half of it, its women, are held down by Moslemism.'

The poet laughed and looked at me, speaking rapidly, words he knew I could only understand a little, but the spirit of the man was comprehensible and admirable.

More tea came and a dish of mulberries, cherries and tiny cucumbers arranged in a bed of pink roses. Everyone took a rose and smelt it as they ate.

The day had drawn towards an end, the sun was low, a golden light shone over the garden and the hills were an exquisite blue. The host put the cucumbers and roses into a handkerchief for me to take to the hotel.

But the carriage had not come! The roads were so hot that they burned our feet, the tall mud walls were like efficient radiators. The boy ran ahead in the hope of finding a wandering carriage, the writer and I walked on with comparative perkiness but little by little the fat doctor dropped behind. I expected him to turn entirely into perspiration and the perspiration into steam, but when we drove back for him he was sitting contentedly by the road, his shoes and tie off, his collar undone. He said he was ready for another meal!

· 3 ·

HOUSEKEEPING IN PERSIA

I DECIDED, on my return to Isphahan, to settle there for a couple of months, as I knew a number of interesting Persians, and during August, Isphahan was comparatively cool. It was quite useless remaining at the hotel as very few women would call upon me: any woman in a

chadar looks very much like any other, to a European, but Persians distinguish small differences. Every town in Persia, except Tehran, is really a village where nothing goes unnoticed, even a new shirt or a new suit is a cause of remark in one city of 30,000 inhabitants. This is, of course, the inevitable result of little education, few books, few newspapers and little travel. If only the Government would supply the whole country with a cheap newspaper it would alter life.

The whole hotel staff always knew who came and went, and if they did not hear me give instructions to the driver, they asked him. I used to play a game of trying to hide my movements by taking a carriage a little distance down the street and on my return getting out in a side street, but I rarely beat those Persians. Some say this is not just human curiosity but part of a careful system of supervision. This may be true, I do not know, but I met with no real difficulty except serious interference with my post. Some feared to have much to do with a foreigner as they might be considered non-patriotic or even anti-patriotic.

If the authorities had realized that it is the people, not the mountains or buildings that make a nation, they would surely have been more willing to drop their national barriers and forget their historical grievances in their contact with an individual who was both friendly and sympathetic. I learnt that there were three Persias, the one that exists, the one the Persians pretend that exists and the one that will be created some day. When I complained to the authorities that people would not come to see me unless they had the permission of the governor or that others had ceased calling because they had received a warning, they gave two replies, that I was suffering from delusions as the Government is very friendly to England, or, that they have to be very careful as Russia is so serious a menace, that, to defend themselves against her and appear equitable they must not be friendly to any nation. One man, however, said quite frankly that he thought anti-English feeling was the only way of developing that nationalism which was essential. 'We must remember our past submission to England and cultivate a sentiment of antagonism or we shall never be a strong nation.' Unfortunately he was a man of influence. The Government is strong enough to prevent criticism, but most people hope for more freedom in the future.

My servant went house-hunting, and after a few days found a little house up a narrow alley, which had the two really necessary qualifications, a south aspect and a tiny pool. There was no bath, but the pool was nice after it had been scrubbed and the mosquito larvae killed. Abbas put a shallow tub of water in the sun every morning and by

three it was quite hot. He arrived every day at 5.30, stayed till 1 p.m., returned for tea at 5 and left about 9, when I locked my gate and felt quite safe within the twelve-foot walls. Helped by a Persian friend, I bought the minimum of furniture and settled down. Abbas spoke a little English, I a little Persian, so we managed the everyday affairs of life. I used to take the dictionary in my left hand, a pencil in my right and throw about nouns and infinitives, but the dictionary was often useless as it was full of elegant, literary Arabic words which he did not know. Usually I left the meals to the servant, but made an effort when there was a guest, but for a time I never felt sure I had not ordered roast camel's tail or stewed donkey's ears. I taught Abbas a few dishes, to which he promptly gave the name of the guest for whom they had first been prepared.

Meals had to be very simple and rather monotonous, as Persia has decided that everyone, except foreign diplomatic officials, shall live on the country. With no tinned goods and no imports, it meant being confined to what was in season. On the plateau there are no fish, not even a sardine. Except in Tehran there was no decent cheese, olive oil or coffee. Many cooks could make excellent tomato and Worcestershire sauce but none of them could make whisky. A certain amount was smuggled in to sell at £1 a bottle, but most was quite unbelievably bad and some was even sweetened.

Persians make one spirit, *arak*, from dates or dried raisins. It is drunk in enormous quantities but is generally bad. The country, that is the Shah, hopes that the prohibition of manufactured foreign goods will encourage local production. There is a great desire to develop this very poor country. The Shah is rich, a few landowners and merchants are rich, but the standard of living is, on the average, very low. Persia is hypnotized by the former successes of the industrialized countries and wishes to follow in their way. A few men realize that there can be no improvement in the condition of either rich or poor if too much money is given to industrial development and the agricultural resources of the country and the nomads are neglected.

Keeping the house and yard really clean was difficult, but it could be managed about twice a week. The cobwebs were the worst. They were so thick that the ceiling could hardly be seen and it was nice, made of small squares of wood. After repeatedly pointing at them with my umbrella they disappeared. How Abbas hated cleaning windows. He said the glass would break. 'Very well', said I at last, 'break it, but I don't tie up your hand if you get cut, and the price of new glass will

be deducted from your wages'. The windows were cleaned. Persian sweeping is hardly satisfactory but full of local colour. The servant gets a bundle of reeds, makes an appalling sand-storm, so that it is hardly possible to see from one end of the room to the other, some of this he gathers up, throws into a corner of the kitchen and the rest settles to make the nucleus of another storm.

Persian servants are so weak on shaving that some people fine them when they become too objectionable, but even that does not change their ways. What kept Abbas in order was forbidding him to ride by the *droscha* driver unless he shaved, and he loved going out.

We did the accounts every morning, a very necessary precaution to avoid too much expenditure, but when all was going well I made the mistake of adopting a cat, who, according to Abbas, had a great love of chops, butter and cake.

Once when I unexpectedly returned a day early, I found the house in disorder and Abbas asleep on *my* bedding, in *my* room, recovering from opium. That put an end to my Persian. It was impossible to sum up the situation elegantly and effectively, so I threw things into the yard and his shoes, socks and coat into the pond. From his speed, I judged that, without the aid of words, he had quite an intelligent grasp of my psychological condition.

A nice man lived next door who spoke a little English, smoked opium every Thursday night and was kindness itself. When I had guests he lent dishes, chairs, pots and pans and told me how much he regretted not having married an Englishwoman during his happy years in Liverpool, as the English really knew how to keep a house tidy. When I met him in that stinking alley, for all the w.c.s opened into it, he used to say, 'I put on English gramophone tonight, make you happy', and sure enough, about ten o'clock, over the high walls came the sound of Harry Lauder or Gracie Fields. Down the lane lived a doctor who had been in India, had a kind girl-wife, a bright and cheery mother and a father who might have come out of the Middle Ages. Whenever I needed help, those two houses were ready to open their doors. One morning at 2 a.m. when the *droscha* man was getting violent about the fare, that doctor, having heard the noise, came out, in his night clothes, and rescued me.

The only serious drawback was that a 'public lady' who lived at the end of the lane used the *tar* very extensively for her enchantments and also apparently to speed her parting guests, for at 6 a.m., music, real and canned, spoilt the dawn.

It was terribly smelly down my alley, as in all alleys in Persia, but life was pleasant.

Women did come to see me, but never as many as I wanted. Some were afraid, others were prevented by their men-folk, who did not like them to go out alone lest I might convert them to Christianity—being really a missionary in disguise—or give them rebellious ideas; others feared they might meet strange men. Men were surprised at what they considered my peculiar desire to talk to women, but opened their eyes when I said, 'But they are half your nation'. Most of the women were dull. I had many guests, and as there were only three chairs we had to sit on the donkey rugs which covered the mud floor. Abbas did keep them clean. Sitting there together I grew to like, and I think to know, a number of Persians.

Most of those who visited me were intelligent. We discussed many subjects, but especially Persian life, the actual present and the dreamed-of future. We did not criticize the present Government; the Persians might fling rocks at Hitler and Ramsay MacDonald but not even a pebble was thrown at the Shah. We talked chiefly of education and religion, for those were burning questions about which there was liberty of opinion.

In Tehran I had a furnished flat to which many women came, but that *chadar* made life difficult, for if a man called when there were women to tea, some of them were not content merely to cover their faces, but had to be hastily pushed into the bedroom, from which they could escape into the hall; others remained but ceased to talk.

Life in Tehran was much easier than in the provinces, but there, too, was that wretched anti-foreign, anti-English feeling which entirely put an end to many contacts. Officers of the army were not allowed to be seen in public with foreign women. In one city I had a friend, a captain, with whom I went for rides in a *droscha* at night. He was interested in education, in altering the position of women and was a devout Moslem who made me understand the hold that religion still has on some of the young educated men. I never mentioned the army or the Government, but each time that we went out he took the risk of being put into prison. The Government made this ruling because it had the general idea that foreign women made their men drunk and then extracted facts.

The one occasion on which a Persian did get drunk in my house I took him out for a walk to sober him up, as I was afraid he might fall into the garden pool. He wanted to fight with the first policeman we met, but I explained that he had had too much *arak*. Fortunately the

policeman thought it a joke, as he was dramatically voluble, in English, about the faults of the Government. That policeman thought I was a joke too, because, a few nights before, I had slapped him when he tried to prevent me going to my own flat because there was a party to welcome a Russian official in the municipal gardens where my flat was situated. I realized the next day that possibly the garden pool would have been less dangerous than the streets.

But, without the house at Ispahan, the flat at Tehran and the tent in the mountains, I would never have acquired the belief that there is growing up a number of fine young Persians who will change their country, giving themselves for her service, caring more for progress than for making money, wishing to wipe out evil and replace it by good. They wanted to become efficient that they might serve. Some were free-thinkers, some reformed Moslems, some fanatical, and a few just wanted to do their work and not be bothered about religion.

Without the intimacy, the simplicity and the confidence which can only be created in one's own home, I should never have known what I do about Persia and the Persians.

There are three groups of Europeans in Persia: the Government officials, the business men and the missionaries. Each group, when asked their opinion of Persians, gave answers so different that they might have spoken of three nations. The missionaries, I think, know and understand the people most accurately; they have often been in the country a long time, speak Persian well, have been in Persian homes and know the people as human beings. Not having to do business with them, they see the best.

No one pretends that Western business men are all honest, but whereas the majority in the West respect honesty as an ideal, the majority of Persians have a quite different point of view, openly admiring the twist that brings success. The West has discovered by experience that, on the whole, 'honesty is the best policy', and no doubt when the East becomes commercialized and competition keen, it will learn the same. We are not, fundamentally, morally superior, but experience has taught us that dishonesty wastes too much time and energy. Generations of this teaching have given to many English people a habit of honesty, which makes life so much pleasanter that we would like to meet it everywhere.

The Persian house could be a home, but the sound of Big Ben over the wireless turned Persia into a mirage and England became the only reality that was constantly desirable.

· 4 ·

ON THE BALCONY

I WENT out to luncheon, always at twelve, sometimes sitting on the floor, sometimes at a table; to teas, to nine-o'clocks, and now and again to dinner, which was any time between nine and midnight! There was always interesting conversation with the men, but rarely with the provincial women. Even when the women could speak well, they listened, sometimes suddenly leaning over to pick up the edge of my silk dress or stroke a pleat. I always enjoyed my visits because the Persians had such a keen sense of humour, and smile responded to smile in a way so intensely human that it went deep below the surface to a place where we all belonged together in our needs and our desires. I do not know that with any other nation I have more acutely felt that primitive oneness. And yet on the surface, the unlikenesses were so many and sometimes so annoying, to them, I am sure, as well as to me.

Unexpectedly picturesque things happened, like the evening when, after dinner, we sat on the balcony and looked across the shining road, across the river bed with its masses of stones and sands, its silvery pools and the little thread of trickling water which was all that August had left. The few groups of poplar trees were a pale green. The white undersides of the leaves danced like tiny plates of burnished silver, and not very far away the rugged mountains, purple, grey and reddish, stood in a line against the sky, each separate, all leaning in one direction as if they were trying to reach each other. Yet it was not day, but a Persian moonlight night; not a world of black and white, but a bright picture where colours as well as light played a part.

Conversation was of this and that until a flute sounded just below. We looked over and saw a young man who wanted to come up to play; and he also wished to bring five other men, friends of his but unknown to us.

'Good, very good. Come up, all of you.'

So we settled down on the beshadowed balcony, only seeing each other's faces when a match was lit. The maid, covered with her gay pink veil, brought out cold cucumber, sherbet, a flask of wine, a dish of biscuits and a plate of grapes, hardly ripe but acceptable to Persians. The flautist had already had rather too much to drink, so spoke slowly, carefully, but there was no hindrance to his playing. He and his best friend, who was a singer, *would* sit on the same chair. The flautist was

not interested in food, but he wanted the others to have their share. We sat in the background watching. He divided the biscuits evenly; he gave each one a bunch of grapes but took nothing himself. When all were supplied he began to play on his reed flute. All but one stop made beautiful clear notes, so clear that passers-by collected on the road. Suddenly his friend leaned over close to him and began to sing, Persian music which was moving and incomprehensible. There was some relation between the flute and the song, but it was not obvious to our untrained Western ears. At intervals the other men joined in with a note or two, but their voices were not beautiful.

When anyone else passed along the road playing, the flautist was filled with emulation, jumped up, stood at the edge of the balcony, leaned over and called down:

'Listen to me', and played furiously, his body bent over in his efforts to produce enough sound to carry far into the night. His rival having passed, he sank back in his chair exhausted, smoked cigarettes, drank a sherbet and tried to get wine, but his friend would not let him have any more.

In the intervals they told many stories, mostly very short, doubling up with laughter in the telling and the hearing. Many Persian tales which are only mildly amusing to us are very funny to them. To get humour from one language to another is always difficult. Countries are more divided from one another by their taste in food and humour than by anything else. This story is characteristic of Persia:

'A Shah gave a feast to three men, but it was so enormous, so generous, that they were very much surprised. They ate quickly and in silence, as Persians do. It is, indeed, just about the one thing over which they hurry, about the one time when their agile tongues do not move. But the food and wine did not make them content or gay.

'One man said, "This sheep did not drink its own mother's milk". The Shah was surprised and a little annoyed.

'The second man said, "This wine was grown in a stony place". The Shah was more surprised and more annoyed.

'The third said, "You, Shah, are not the son of your father", whereupon the Shah was so angry that he wished to turn them out, but they asked to be allowed to explain.

'The first said, "Eating the mutton has made me feel wild and more hungry than ever, because the sheep was suckled by a dog".

'The second said, "This wine has made me sad because it was grown in a garden that was once a graveyard".

'The third said, "And you have been so generous with food and wine because your father was a cook".

'The Shah was so delighted with these explanations that he ordered more wine and meat, but would have had his mother beaten if she had not been already dead.'

The following combines the fantastic with a moral warning:

'A man, Ibrahim, had bought large quantities of wheat in order to make money during a famine, but stored it so long that the price went down. He became desperately poor and so had to become a baker's assistant. In the bakehouse he laboured hard and long, kneading the dough until he became very strong. One day, when sitting at the door getting a little breath of fresh air, a merchant passed, saying loudly, "Who will be my servant? I will, for forty days, give him everything he can desire, food, money and women, if he will work for me".

'Ibrahim jumped up, "Please take me as your servant, sir. I am very poor, I am willing to do anything".

'When the merchant and Ibrahim reached the house Ibrahim was put into a room where everything was beautiful, brass, silver and copper vessels. Each night for supper he had the finest and whitest rice, chickens, gazelles, luscious fruit and then sweet coffee. Supper over, he rested, and then was given a beautiful maiden. This went on for forty days, the meat and the maiden being different every night. Then the merchant came, saying, "Here is a cord and a very sharp knife. Come with me", and they went out to the stable and found a cow.

'"Put the cord around its neck and we will go to the mountains", said the merchant.

'When they reached a far valley the merchant said:

'"Cut off the cow's head, skin the body", and when all was skilfully done, he continued, "Now get inside the skin". Ibrahim obeyed, when the merchant tied up the neck and fixed on the head, leaving a tiny hole through which Ibrahim could breathe. Suddenly a great bear came and, taking hold of what he thought was a cow, dragged it to the top of the mountain, but when he tore the skin Ibrahim jumped out and the bear was so scared he ran away.

'Imagine Ibrahim's astonishment when he saw that the ground around him was covered with gold, silver and jewels. Suddenly he heard the voice of the merchant calling up the valley:

'"Ibrahim, Ibrahim, what do you see?"

'"I see jewels at my feet, the desert on one side and the sea on the other."

“Would you like to come down?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Then do as I say. Throw down forty handfuls of treasure and I can explain.”

Ibrahim had become very strong so it was easy for him to throw so much such a long way—but—the merchant went away in silence.

‘And there stood Ibrahim with the desert on one side and the sea on the other. “I must jump”, he said. “But which will it be?” and decided the sea would be better.

‘He dropped into the water, but he was so far from the land that he would certainly have been drowned if a whale whom he had seen before had not come and carried him to the shore. The whale was so kind because, when Ibrahim had been the baker’s assistant, he used to take stale bread and throw it into the sea for the animal.

‘So Ibrahim walked back to his town and once more became a baker’s assistant.

‘Again the merchant went by, saying as before, “I want a servant who must do as he is told but in return shall have all he wants”.

‘So Ibrahim went to him and offered to be his servant. He looked at him closely. “Have you never been my servant before?”

“No, sir. It was a cousin of mine but he has disappeared.”

‘So Ibrahim went to the house and all was repeated as before, but when he was told to get into the animal’s skin Ibrahim said he was afraid and asked the merchant to show him the way. As soon as the merchant was inside, Ibrahim quickly tied the skin together, put on the head and the same bear came and took the merchant to the top of the mountain. When he called down, asking the way to escape, Ibrahim ordered him to throw down the jewels to fill the panniers of the forty donkeys that were already waiting.

‘When the animals were loaded, Ibrahim said that he had returned by jumping in the sea.

‘The merchant cheerfully said that they would soon be meeting, but he was drowned and Ibrahim became a rich man. But he had been sufficiently punished and never again did he disobey the Koran and attempt to make money by robbing the poor.’

The visitors all spoke in an unaffected way of the beauty of the night, and all but one recited poems. The flautist was a mechanic, perhaps. The soldiers, being conscripted, might have been anybody. Nobody asked; nobody cared. They all liked music; they all had an æsthetic culture which made them love poetry and the beautiful night.

They all had charming manners. After an hour and a half they left, taking one of our hands in both of theirs, using polite expressions of gratitude, bowing low and gracefully. We had been good comrades; if they ever had feelings of animosity towards England because of the time when she had dominated southern Persia, they were forgotten for that evening.

We saw them go down the road, gay and carefree; then settled down to watch the changing colours of the world and the sky, as the moon sank behind one of Persia's innumerable Matterhorns.

· 5 ·

NEW JULFA THE CLEAN

SOON after reaching Ispahan everyone visits Julfa, because its shops are so much better.

Julfa is what most people call it, New Julfa is how it is known to its Armenian inhabitants, but to me it was Julfa the Clean.

It is only two miles from Ispahan, but what a difference! I kept repeating to myself, 'Clean, clean, clean'. The streets are clean, the shops, the churches, the houses, the gardens, the people. Persia as a whole is dirty, but the Persians know it, regret it and intend to make it clean. The last is the most important—they intend to make it clean. But Julfa is ahead of them at present. Julfa proves that it is not the climate that makes the cities so dirty.

This city was founded about three hundred years ago by Shah Abbas, who brought, it is said, 12,000 Armenians from the city of Julfa in the Caucasus that they might teach better craftsmanship to the Persians. They were good masons, carpenters, goldsmiths; they could make tiles with designs and beautiful carpets with fine details. The Shah wanted them to be contented in his Moslem world, so aided them in building twenty-one churches.

Most of the Armenians stayed in the city, but some became agriculturists, both in the neighbourhood of Julfa and in the Bakhtiari Mountains. But until the last few years, since the Shah has wisely tried to break down racial barriers within the country, the Armenians led a separate life, the two peoples despising one another very heartily, in a fifty-fifty way.

To-day Julfa contains about 10,000 people, the neighbouring villages about 3,000, but the sons of Julfa are in their thousands in India,

especially Calcutta, in various parts of Persia and scattered about the world.

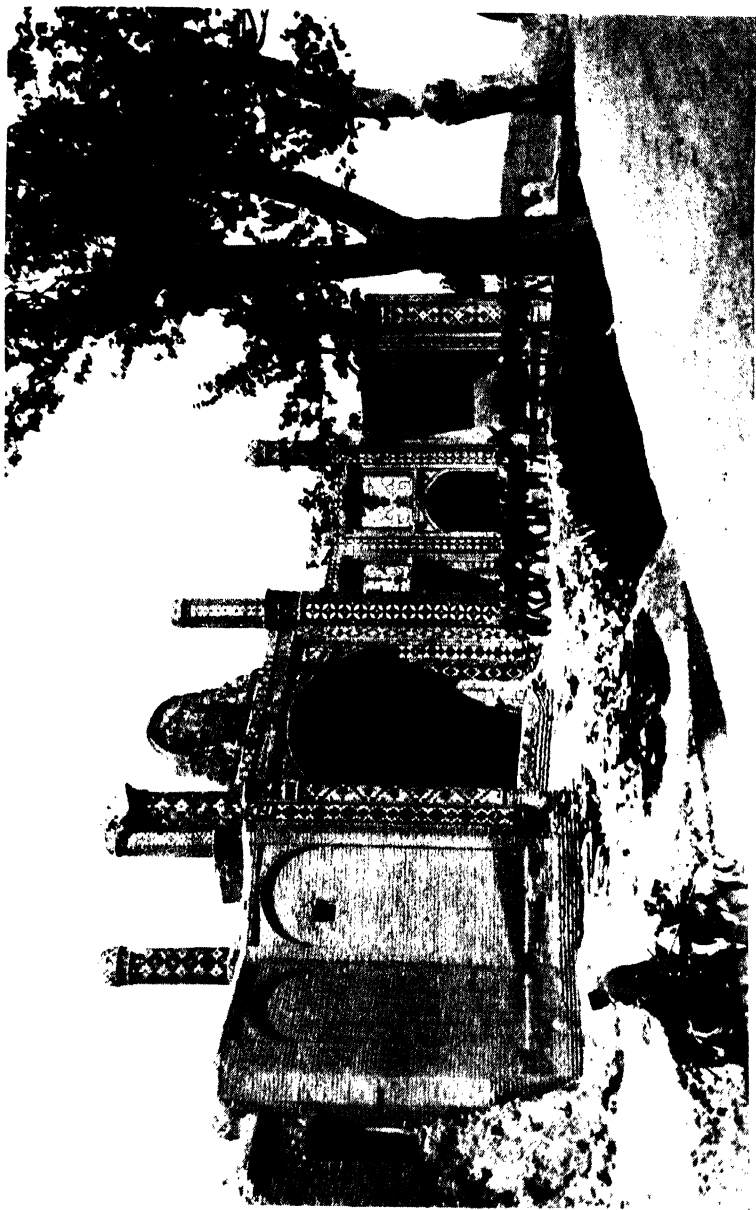
There has always been a great migration from Julfa because there were so few chances for Armenians in Persia, but when the A.P.O.C. began, about twenty years ago, it had many openings for educated men who spoke English, so the positions were filled by men from Julfa, with the result that the town has gradually altered and Armenians have altered too. They are no longer craftsmen, they are business men, some say successful because twisters, and others because they are hard workers, capable of endurance and persistence. A visit to Julfa at once suggests that they are more alert than the Ispahanese; their clothes are tidy, they are more frequently shaved, they are more resourceful and obliging in their shops. Their women have all given up the *chadar* and the younger ones are prettily and smartly dressed. There was a very great difference between them in the heat wave of August, 1933. The Persians just went flop, they shaved less than usual, they went about in under-drawers and collar-less shirts, but the Armenians, like the English, faced the very damp and sticky situation and kept tidy in body and in mind. But there was an indication of hope for the future, for some of the younger Persians did not give way, like their fathers, but went swimming, played games, ate more fruit and guzzled less rice. The younger generation promised well.

Some Armenians have grown enormously rich; there is a tale that an Armenian multimillionaire-merchant, who had branches all over Persia, southern Russia and Turkey, who owned thousands of camels and donkeys for the transport of his goods, gave tea to a Shah in a golden samovar which he heated, not with charcoal, but with notes.

Another Armenian is said to have designed and built the beautiful bridge at the end of the Chadar Bagh, but the local Shah wanted to cross to Julfa before it was complete. The Shah arrived to find an enormous hole, too big for him to pass over.

'Have patience a moment, oh Great and Exalted One', said the Armenian and sent to his house for bags of silver to fill up the gap.

To-day most of the Armenians are poor and few are really rich, but the town continues to live comfortably because it is semi-parasitic upon its sons who work in distant cities. The filial spirit is so well developed among the Armenians, there is such a strong tradition that sons should support their parents, that the young have to bear a quite intolerable burden. Men send money home, hence must marry late, with little or no money to give them a start. Another difficulty is that so many men mi-



A picturesque Gate of Kazvin.

grate that there are no husbands for the girls, and they too have to be supported. The Armenians differ greatly in one way from the Moslems, for while very poor Persians have at least one servant, the Armenians have few or none, the mother and daughters doing all the work. But there is not enough work for a number of daughters, so, whatever time you go to Julfa, there are girls walking along the streets or sitting on the two seats which are at the sides of every door; too many girls have nothing to do except to spend their time and their brothers' cash making needless dresses and hats.

A number of Armenian girls are nurses, especially in the foreign hospitals. As they do not wear a *chadar*, they can also do something for the men patients. The Moslem hospitals prefer, if possible, to have Moslem nurses. One doctor said he would not have Armenian nurses as they were much greater talkers than doers, but this attitude is probably part of the antagonism which exists between the two peoples.

One would imagine that many Persians would fall in love with and marry Armenians, as the girls are uncovered, good-looking and well dressed, but the racial and religious antagonism between the two is so strong that, although the Persians go to Julfa to dance, to see plays, to watch the girls at the cinema and during the Sunday parade, there is little intermarriage. Marital ideals are very different, for only one wife is allowed under Armenian law, which, in a number of ways, goes on undisturbed by its Moslem neighbour. Men and maids fall in love within the shadow of the Orthodox Church and marry with the hope and intention of remaining together. Divorce takes place only with the advice and approval of the bishop and is not popular. Further, the Armenians have found that, when one of their girls marries a Moslem, the latter generally gets tired of her and wants a divorce in a few months. It is said that none of these mixed marriages have ever lasted more than six years. Or the Moslem husband may add another wife. Then the play begins, for jealousy is laudable. It is interesting that even in Tehran the Armenian girl, although much sought after by the Moslem, rarely consents to marry him on account of his protean and polygamous tendencies.

Julfa is very proud that it has a museum of antiquities, many lovely embroideries and manuscripts, a library of old books, a library in connection with the cathedral of new books in many languages, schools which have existed for about fifty years, an endowed hospital and an orphanage for girls. The orphanage was founded by a convent of the Orthodox Church, but as the nuns died no one took their place. The

orphans made beautiful embroideries and carpets. There was also a monastery which did the same work for boys, but death also brought that to an end. Julfa considers itself much more civilized than any Persian city except Tehran. 'But', said a travelled and honest Armenian, 'although we have been in front of the Moslems for centuries, now they are catching us up. This Shah has done miracles. We owe it to him that our women no longer wear the *chadar*, for he has made life safe for them. A Moslem can no longer run away with a pretty girl and not be punished. We could not have been here fifteen years ago; we'd have had our throats cut.' A large group were having breakfast at a *chai-karneh* high up on the side of Kuh-i-Sufeh, that lovely mountain which dominates Ispahan, and where, because there was a spring, a man had made a tank, four terraces which were bright with flowers even in the driest, hottest days of August. 'Let me tell you another thing about Persians', he continued. 'When they are well-off they are lazy and self-indulgent, eating too much, sleeping too much. They will not walk up here as we Armenians do.'

'But some of the young men walk', I said. 'They climb all over the mountain.'

'Yes, especially those who have been to the English Missionary College and who have learned the value of sport. There was a clergyman, called Eiliff, who had enormous influence. The boys called a good jump, a good dive, a long day's outing by his name. That is the influence of the West and Christianity. We have been in contact with the West through our schools in Calcutta as well as through those of us who used to go to Russia and Europe.'

The museum at Julfa made me both glad and sad; glad that at least one group in Persia was carefully preserving its treasures, sad that, so near, the splendid city of Ispahan, which is as rich in antiques as any city could desire, should have no museum. Every time I went into the Imperial Bank of Persia or the National Bank I wondered how so many of the clerks could be untidy when, daily, they saw their tidy European bosses, and, every day in Ispahan, I wondered how the city could be content to let its antiques remain in shops whilst Julfa set it such a good example so short a distance away.

Julfa now has a cathedral and only twelve other churches, the remainder having disappeared; architecturally they have little value, but some of them contain good ceiling-decorations and a number have really beautiful tiles, some with pictures so delicately drawn that they might be enlarged miniatures. In the Meidan Church the colour and the

drawing of the trees and animals are particularly fine and delicate. The combination of these qualities with such brilliance of colour is startling and stimulating.

The churches are built at the side of a courtyard which usually has a couple of trees; on one side is a small Holy-Mary Chapel, apparently not much used now; on the third is a series of small houses for the poor and old, and on the fourth is the home of the priest. In these alms-houses, as in the Armenian villages, the women still wear the old costumes, which are ugly and awkward, although there are lovely details in the embroidery and in the fine silver work of the head ornaments and the belt. In Julfa I saw the loveliest piece of material in Persia. A skirt of brilliant, deep-rose velvet on an old woman. It was torn and mended, old but glorious, making everything, even the Persian sky, faded and lifeless.

It is apparently the proper thing to go to church, but the old enthusiasm is dying and many of the young are unbelievers although they do not shout it from the housetops, for religion has a nationalist value to the Armenians. It is a symbol of unity in a land which both is and is not their own, for, whilst most are perfectly loyal to Persia, a few dream of a future United Armenia, a people of only ten millions perhaps, but developing their own culture, living peaceably and undisturbed in their own land.

The present government has insisted, surely quite rightly, that they should all learn Persian in their schools, for, until that order came, many Armenians spoke English fluently and little Persian. The new nationalism is cutting both ways, for it is gently but insistently expected that some Persians should take the place of Armenians in business, that the latter should rarely have the higher places in the army or government services, and, since the A.P.O.C. (Anglo-Persian Oil Company) agreement, Persians are being rapidly introduced into that company, without, it is rumoured, too much success, as they do not work as hard as the Armenians. (There has been no mention of this famous company and will not be again, but when I asked an American what he thought of the controversy, he merely replied, 'There's never oil without a snake'.) An interesting sidelight is thrown on their industry by the fact that in the Bakhtiari district some of the big owners of the villages are encouraging Armenians to replace Persians, as the former work twice as hard as the latter.

There has been a Roman Catholic convent in Julfa for thirty years, which had a boarding school, a day primary school and a dispensary.

There are also a few missionary priests who had a boys school and a church for the hundred Armenians who were Roman Catholics. When the new regulations came into force forbidding foreigners to have primary schools, the boys school was closed and the Fathers saw the end of their life-work, but the Armenians made a special appeal to the government that the girls school might go on, and, as a special favour to the Armenian Christians, permission, possibly only temporary, has been granted.

Julfa was clean compared with Ispahan, but the sweetness and spotless order of the convent school made one realize how short-sighted the Persians are to get rid of such a living example of some of the best characteristics of the West. They say they want to Westernize their backward country, but refuse the help of influences which are good; they say they want to understand Europe, but, at present, will have little contact with Europeans. The government sends a few thousand young Persians to Europe, where few of them ever know the better classes, and yet makes it difficult for them to associate with the many excellent Europeans who are in Persia.

If the government would help a few really cultured Europeans to stay for a year in some of her towns, studying one or more aspects of her life, and encourage the Persians to be friends with these students, it would be of enormous value to the growing generation. Serious and intelligent foreigners would not wish to turn Persians into Europeans, but they would help to increase mutual understanding.

The annoyance and irritation of the Armenians against the Moslems have been much reduced since the latter have allowed the Armenians into their food shops and have ceased to treat them as if they were unutterably unclean. It seems probable that the Armenians will, in a couple of generations, be absorbed by the Persians, but some Armenians say proudly that not in ten generations will they disappear. Some Persians are deeply annoyed that the Armenians insist upon their nationality and some extreme Armenians gnash their teeth at the least sign of their people becoming less aggressively nationalist. Moslems are now living in Julfa, Armenians are living in all parts of Persia, not as segregated communities but as individuals. The Armenians, with their ability, will certainly not want to be pushed out of all the best positions in Persia, and if the country is to develop satisfactorily it will need the best brains available, regardless of race and religion.

THE BROWN CITY OF YEZD

THE sun set in a lemon-yellow sky, and the mountains to the east had a moment of rosy loveliness as we drove into Yezd. Semi-darkness fell suddenly upon the brown town, a light shone from a high pole, a great number of camels which had just arrived from the east rolled and stretched in the sand after the day's work and the moon came up, lighting the mountains.

Yezd is a brown city, brown earth, brown walls, even the ripe wheat was brown. Here and there were a few mulberry trees, pollarded to feed the silkworms which are the basis of the successful life of the town, and a few flowers. Only a few houses had real gardens.

But in the garden where I was to live it was cool, because of two ponds, because the leaves of the quince, apricot and pomegranate trees sent a gentle moisture into the dry air. It was difficult to breathe in the road, but under the trees life came back. In the house too, in spite of the great rooms, the air was dead and stagnant, so I slept on the roof, protected by a net from mosquitoes and sand flies. The dust, the noise and the heat of those days in the desert were at last at an end, at least for a few days, and above me was a world of so many stars there hardly seemed room for the sky. The Milky Way stretched like a brightly shining band across the darkness. The Persians call it Yellow Straw, for it is said to be the straw that flew behind as the hero Rustam rode to conquest on his fabulous horse Raksh. A quarter-moon faintly lit the innumerable walls of this great city which stretched for miles into the desert. I learnt during the following days that if the tumble-down houses were destroyed and the inhabited buildings put together, the city would be about a quarter of its present size. There is only one good street and everywhere walls, houses, cellars are tumbling down; even the graves are falling in, and yet there are a number of rich people in Yezd.

If you are displeased with your house, you just leave, taking down the woodwork, and build another; there is plenty of mud, straw is

cheap, human labour is both plentiful and cheap, so the town moves across the plain. A house costs little, but trees take a long time to grow, and water is scarce and expensive, as every drop is brought many miles in *ghannats*.

I slept in spite of a violent wind and waked to find the world changed but still beautiful. Two rollers, the birds called greenmantles by the Persians, were tumbling adroitly just beyond the edge of the roof, but the air was not yet light enough to show their lovely wings. A flock of swallows went by, almost touching the top of my mosquito net. They were fewer than a couple of months earlier, for many had already gone north. I was often doubtful if England existed, but its reality came back vividly when I saw the birds which would so soon be there. I wondered which swallows decided to stay in Persia and why a particular one chose to build in the filthy bazaar of Yezd instead of in my clean old apple-house. Then two ducks flew across so high that their necks were hardly visible. Ducks in this dry land were quite out of place, but they knew where to go to on the high mountains. For a few minutes the rising sun made the mountains pink and then they were wiped out by a dust-storm.

Yezd is picturesque with its fine old citadel, its innumerable narrow streets, but it is not beautiful. One mosque falling to ruins has some beautiful tiles. The guardian, at a price, let me go into the courtyard, only as far as the entrance, but even then the mob outside yelled in disapproval. The Persian chauffeur, however, drove them away with robust English. 'Beat it, you blood damn ignorants.'

The Moslems in Yezd are very fanatical and this year at Moharram, when orders came that the big wagon, one for each section of the town, decorated with looking glasses and containing the corpse of Hussein, could not be carried in procession by the men, there were riots, which became yet more violent when the people learnt that there were to be no processions of any kind and no one was to be allowed to beat themselves with chains or cut their bodies with knives. The women gathered in the square, made an attack upon the head of the police and were only restrained from throwing stones by the police and fifty armed soldiers. It is said that the women went out, not because they were more fanatical than the men, but because they knew they would be treated more leniently.

The government is extraordinarily wise in its method of introducing new habits or getting rid of old ones. When it finds it has gone too far, as at Yezd, the blame is put on the governor, who is removed to another

district, and the new governor makes less radical changes. Different parts of Persia live in different centuries and each needs special treatment. The disaster which followed the too-rapid changes in Afghanistan is never forgotten. To go wisely Persia must go warily.

Old habits flourish in Yezd, where it is still usual for men to have two to four wives.

The bazaar is far more Oriental than at Ispahan and far more dirty. Here men are allowed to prepare animals' intestines in the open. The smell was awful, the flies worse. Meat here was always cheap but cheaper in summer. The bazaar was full of the products of the district—wheat, barley, *kalyon* tobacco and opium. Yezd tobacco is pale yellow; local connoisseurs say it is spoilt when brown. In the tiny alcoves men were working at a simple kind of cotton gin and earning only two and a half krans a day, but it bought enough bread, and Persian bread is wholesome. The cotton seed, which still retained a considerable amount of threads, is either used as camel food or crushed to produce burning or edible oil.

The most picturesque part of the bazaar belonged to the dyers. One business was in an immense finely domed building where wool was being dyed a glorious orange with a permanent German dye, as orange cannot be made in Persia; the fine cotton yarn, which is still allowed to be imported from India, was being treated with native products, pomegranate skins, indigo, etc.

Yezd is full of tiny factories which weave cotton and wool, but silk is woven only in the private houses of the Jews. As the local supply of silk is inadequate, artificial silk was imported until the new laws. Yezd silk is famous because few Persians have seen any first-class materials. Most of it is very poor, both in weave and colour, but the city does make a good silk which is exported to India for turbans.

I spent one morning in a village about ten miles away where silkworms were cultivated under extremely primitive and unclean conditions, quite different from the methods used in the districts by the Caspian Sea, where the Greeks have modernized and centralized the industry.

The peasants buy fresh eggs each year from Baghdad or Resht.

'If we keep the eggs then will the animals jump from their boxes', said a man quaintly, for the leaves are only suitable as food from the middle of March to the end of May. And he continued his narrative, 'When it finish the leaves then it round itself in the cocoon, and there must be silence or they are interrupt'. But he could not understand that

his real enemy were the dead worms and dirty mulberry branches which lay about from year to year.

Nearly all the Zoroastrian peasants in the village had become Bahais, but the women still wore their own old costumes. Here, as everywhere in Persia, they took me into their gardens and loaded me with fruit. The apricots were at their best, the cucumbers small and delicious, the black mulberries just ripe, but everyone was depressed, as there had been a number of serious insect plagues, against which they would use no other protection than charms.

All the little factories I visited were clean and airy and all were provided with that charm, the *Esfand*, made of the tri-partite berries of the dashtee plant which grows in the desert, with the addition of blue and pink bits of material. This berry is used extensively by Zoroastrians, being burnt every morning on the house fire, at marriages and at funerals in order to send away evil spirits. In a nice new factory supplied with modern German machines, each one had its own particular *Esfand*, as anything new and surprising is particularly apt to attract evil. The Moslems, when using the *Esfand*, No-Ruz and other customs, are retaining ceremonials connected with the Zoroastrian religion, and even the more primitive religions which it replaced.

Yezd could not supply enough cotton for its looms, so it had to be brought from the south, but it was a Persian variety, very poor and unproductive. Neither had Yezd enough wool for carpets and cloths, so that came long distances from Baluchistan and Afghanistan. Persia is not well supplied with sheep, as her soil is too saline and too dry.

In the city I saw a small piece of carpet made during the reign of Shah Abbas, which was woven very thick, not by increasing the length of the pile but by a very complicated base, as it was required to lie still and flat that there should be no movement during dancing and wrestling shows.

Yezd has a mixed population of 60,000 Moslems, 8,000 Zoroastrians or Parsees, and 2,000 Jews.

The Jewish women are distinguished by wearing *chadars* which are, theoretically, white. They are very poor, living in dirty and crowded houses where they work hard at spinning and weaving, but I learnt, by experience, that in spite of their poverty they are very strict about both buying and selling on Saturday.

I had an introduction to a Zoroastrian who had a charming, gentle face. He was shabbily dressed, not because he was poor but because

he was careful. He took me to his house, where I met his family, and as he talked about his religion we had tea, iced water, iced lemonade, cucumbers and apricots. We sat at a table in a large, totally unfurnished room, the floor covered with beautiful carpets and in one corner a considerable library of books in Persian, Arabic and English which had belonged to a learned relation who, only fifteen years ago, had been murdered in the street, the assassin having been paid 100 krans (about £4).

Zoroaster, the son of Pourus Haspa and Dughdora, is said to have been born about 1000 B.C. in the spring time, in eastern Persia, and to have been beautiful as well as strong in body and mind. He married Hvori, and had three sons and three daughters. He started early a reformed religion in which Ahura Mazda, the one good and only god, was worshipped, its symbols being the sun, the moon and fire, which represented truth and purity. He taught people to give up the old *dævas*, or nature gods, and that true worship was not bloody offerings or senseless customs, but purity of mind and an ardent fulfilment of duty, of which the most important was agriculture.

Zoroaster, called the 'First Tiller of Land', was apparently the first teacher to realize 'that the plough was the noblest and most useful instrument against confusion and disorder'. According to the Gathas, the oldest part of the Vend-Avesta, there was in Zoroaster's time, as there still is today, a constant struggle between the husbandmen and the nomads, the latter stealing from and attacking the former. Zoroastrianism was not an ascetic religion, but attempted to make a fine balance between body and soul. A Gathic prayer reads, 'I pray for that mighty power by which we may smite evil . . . Give me abundant glory, abundant nourishment, abundant riches, a cultivated mind and an active soul; give me an active offspring, virtuous, intelligent, clever, delivering men from misery and woe, as strong and brave as a hero', and then follows the warning, 'but do not acquire the riches of the material world at the cost of the spiritual'.

There was no fasting in Zoroastrianism and also no slothfulness. The cock Parodus says at the break of dawn, 'Arise, a long sleep does not behove you; he who rises first enters the best world, driving away idleness and procrastination'.

The Zoroastrian priest, whose principal function is to pray for the people, must be married in order to perform certain ceremonies.

The Zoroastrians are the only pure race in Persia and the only pure Iranians. They are sturdy, industrious, and have, until recently, been

far more clean and honest than the Moslems. It is said that they are very grasping and for centuries played the part of money-lenders, just as the crushed Jews did in Europe. On account of their difficult position until the coming of the present Shah, a great many migrated to India and became the flourishing Parsees, who have in their turn sent money to Persia to start schools, hospitals and orphanages.

The Gathas, which has a great deal of ethical teaching and was the foundation of the religion, was followed by the Vendidad, which is full of minute instructions for carrying out purifications, for which cows' urine was frequently essential. I spent a very interesting and entertaining afternoon with nine Zoroastrians, seven Persians and two Indian Parsees. The Parsees had certainly added to the original religion a great deal of Hinduism, that would have deeply surprised Zoroaster, but they all seemed to have forgotten the principles of the religion in thousands of minute ritual observances. A discussion arose about the purifying qualities of cows' urine, which is imported into Persia from India, and in their dispute they quite forgot me! There was something exceedingly humorous in nine adults seriously discussing this bottled liquid. I was between a man of the old school and one of the younger generation who alternately whispered in my ears, 'He's only a young man, and knows nothing'. 'He's only a doddering old fool trying to keep dead ideas alive', but the peace nearly came to an end when the young man said violently, 'Well, give me a cake of carbolic soap and keep your bottle of cows' urine'.

The older man also believed that all life should be dominated by thoughts of the future, but the younger considered this a misinterpretation of the Gathas, in which this world came first and the future second.

In the neighbourhood of Yezd there are twenty-one Zoroastrian villages where a number of the peasants have become Bahais. Bahaism has all the ethical teaching of the Gathas and none of the restrictions which make life so isolated and so tiresome. In the army the Zoroastrians and Moslems have the same cook, eat at the same table and they don't see why such friendliness should cease when they return to civil life. One of the advantages of universal, compulsory military service is that it is breaking down religious barriers. With this change there will follow intermarriage and, after a few generations, perhaps a considerable difference in the mentality of the Persians.

Zoroastrianism, which was a fight against evil, especially against lies, was firmly established in Persia by 700 B.C.; all the famous Greek writers

were familiar with its ideas and conceptions, which directly and indirectly have played a big part in Western civilization and have had a profound influence in moulding Jewish, Christian and Moslem religions.

Inscriptions at Persepolis indicate that the king was a representative of God upon earth and so had enormous power, but the Zoroastrian king, Darius, was so broad-minded that he not only liberated the Jews in Babylon but allowed them to build their temples. Zoroastrianism is said to have become degenerate owing to Greek influence, but it was revived by Ardesher (A.D. 226) of the Sassanian dynasty. His son, the great Shapur I, who conquered the Roman emperor Valerian, killed the religious prophet Mani, whose ideas were a mixture of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, and made edicts against the Christians. The Zoroastrian religion continued till A.D. 681, when the Sassanian dynasty was brought to an end by the Arabs, but one writer says, 'The influence of the Iranian spirit fell upon the Moslems . . . in fact, the conquest of Islam by the Iranian spirit was more complete and profound than the conquest of the Persian Empire by Islam'.

Few, however, realize the force and power of Zoroastrianism but chiefly think of it as a religion that puts its dead into towers of silence—there to be eaten by birds. It is said that people were originally buried in the usual way, but the bodies were put near the surface. After the flesh had been eaten by scavenging animals the bones were collected and put in the tower. But once, when the Afghans came into Persia and killed so many people that there was no time to bury them, they were put immediately into the tower. The Zoroastrian has no objection to being eaten by birds, considering it far pleasanter than burial, into the details of which we never enter. The tombs of silence must, however, be far away from towns, as ordinary people do not like the birds to drop finger joints and eyes upon them. The towers in India are surrounded by birds, but I did not see one in Persia.

There are now three towers in the low foot-hills about nine miles from Yezd, one having recently been built because the others were too full. The towers in Persia, at Yezd, Kerman and Tehran, are not tall and slender like those in India. It is a long way to take the bodies and very expensive, as many bearers are necessary and each, at the end, has to be well fed on meat and wine, so the community is asking permission from India to have a wagon. When I reached Kerman I found they did have a wagon, drawn by a horse which took the bodies for their long, last journey. At Kerman they have quite recently begun to

put the women, dressed in a long robe, in one tower, and the men, only wearing a loin cloth, in another; in order, it is said, that the attendants may not see the women's bodies. I could not discover who had started this 'reform', which is contrary to the spirit of equality between men and women which is characteristic of Zoroastrianism.

Flowers play a considerable part in the funeral service; they are arranged in two rows, four bunches in each, the flowers being picked up as certain words are repeated. Zoroaster is supposed to have written, 'The grand voice of nature speaks of God to the soul in a way that books can never speak'.

The soul is believed to leave the body at dawn on the fourth day, when it starts on its journey to the Chinvat Bridge, where all must appear before a tribunal. To the good comes a beautiful maiden who helps them into heaven, but the wicked see a woman so ugly that they are frightened and fall into a pit.

Parsee women all look alike and they all look fat, but the men don't look either alike or fat. That's what clothes can do. The men wear modern clothes but the women still wear their old costumes, which are certainly picturesque and certainly tiresome. Their trousers, made of strips of material beautifully embroidered as far as the knees, are very thick and heavy and so voluminous that the women have to walk with their feet wide apart, a very unattractive waddle. Over them comes a long skirt, also made of strips of material but not embroidered, sewn on to a clumsy bodice; above is a stiff jacket. There is plenty of colour and formerly there were beautiful materials, but the women are lost under a bundle of garments that have no grace or charm. Some of the women are replacing trousers and skirts of strips by ordinary cotton materials.

The body being hidden, the women then start on their heads; first they put on a little cap which fits tightly round the face, giving to all that fat rounded look. Some women are pretty, not many, but their looks are improved by an antimony pencil which is rubbed on their upper and lower lashes, not, it is said, for any coquettish reason, but to protect their eyes from the bright light. The story goes that Parsee women wear glasses less than the Moslems, but there's a strong probability that it is because they are too mean to pay the cost, for centuries of oppression have given an exaggerated value to the *shi*.

Over the cap goes the *maghannam*, a kind of silk scarf, laid flat; the head is finished by the *soya kooy*, a large shawl which when arranged gives the effect of a turban with long ends. Putting it on is a complex business, as it is twisted here and there and over and under, but, when

once on, it stays. In the winter one *soya kooy* goes on after another until the woman is painfully top-heavy. The gay old woman who gave a demonstration of how it should be arranged put on the whole collection produced for my entertainment, just for the fun of it, until the Parsee women among whom I sat were in roars of laughter. And last of all there is another shawl around the shoulders.

The silk *maghannams* and *soya kooy*s of old days have been replaced by the astonishingly inferior cotton material made in Russia and Japan. Until recently the women also used the gay rose-covered Russian shawls, but they are now on the list of prohibited imports.

The embroidery formerly made by the Parsee women was very good and had a number of traditional designs, especially a curious symbolical bird, probably representing Hormuz the Good, but now the women say it takes too long to make. They also made curtains with designs on the batik principle, and somehow used their teeth to twist the places where the dye was not wanted, but, as it took six months to make a curtain, that art is now lost.

The busiest time in a Parsee woman's life is the Gamba, when a family takes its turn to give food for several days to the poor, both Parsee and Moslem. The Parsee committee arranges who shall give and when, the amount spent depending on the income. The Gamba may take place once to four times a year; sometimes a man who owns a village gives the whole rent for one year, another kills and cooks a sheep, makes bread and soup, giving to anyone who comes a bowl of soup, two or three pieces of bread and half a pound of cooked meat. All the women of the family aid in the preparation of the food, which plays an important part in helping the destitute in a country which is without poor law or workhouses. This central committee also tries to arrange work in order to reduce mendicity.

The Parsee woman differs from her Moslem neighbour in leaving her face uncovered. Thus young people can know each other, even fall in love. One wife only is allowed; no divorce, and it is generally said that the Parsees are more moral than the Moslems. The rich give the daughter a dowry but the middle folk give only clothes, a little furniture, the really important items being mirrors and kitchen utensils. But most Parsees, like most Moslems, have until recently had few household possessions except clothes and carpets, for the floor is a bed, a chair and a table, the meals are served on big trays, knives, forks and spoons being few or unknown.

Parsee women were considered the equal of men from the earliest

times, with a little reservation. In a sacred book of possibly a thousand years ago it says, 'We offer praise and homage to the house mistress, holy and guiding aright, promoting good thoughts, words and deeds, receiving her instructions well and obeying her husband'.

The real difficulty in the Parsee woman's life is the amount of time and energy spent on religious purification; for the men there is very much less. Some houses even have a small room where the women must remain until they can go through their ceremonies.

When a child is born a woman is not only unclean at the time but for ten days after in one town and forty in another, and anyone who touches her is unclean too, so all midwifery is done by the Moslems. The religious groups in Persia have an entertaining way of making use of each other: it is wicked for a Moslem to make wine, so he gets it done by a Jew or an Armenian! A Parsee woman came into a hospital to have her baby and was visited by her mother, who explained in the most charming and polite Persian that she was deeply grateful to the English woman-doctor but regretted it was impossible to shake hands with one who had become unclean.

The belief that water, earth and even fire can become unclean makes sanitation very difficult; the authorities who want decent streets are constantly having trouble as the Zoroastrians refuse to burn their rubbish and, when no one is looking, dump it in odd places in the narrow alleys. They have an optimistic idea that the wind will carry it away, and sometimes much of it does go when a wild sand-storm comes along. No foreigner is allowed in their churches, as even a glance would make the sacred fire impure.

The Zoroastrians are anxious to educate their women and have their own schools, as the government cannot yet supply enough, the cost being borne partly by the local community and partly by gifts from rich Indian Parsees. One Parsee girl now has a bicycle, a driving licence, and even acts as her father's chauffeur. She was persuaded into this act of outrageous rebellion by her *fiancé*, who is very advanced, does not think she should be married until at least twenty-two, that no babies should come for a few years, and that they should be limited to two! And that in a land where a child is almost a biannual function. He hopes that he and she will work together, not only in their home life but in his business. This man spent seven years in Europe learning English, French and German, but suddenly realized one day that, although it was a great advantage to bring back ideas and inventions from the successful and comfortable West, it was only suitable

for a Persian to marry a Persian woman or vice versa. 'I saw that, for me, there was no mother-love in Europe. I saw that the beautiful and rich European women that I knew so well, that I even thought I wished to marry, would never understand me nor I them, and that I could never trust them, but I know that my Persian wife would be faithful to me even if she slept with another man.

'My wife will wear European clothes of the best make, we shall have tables and all that is elegant, but perhaps sometimes we may want to sit on the floor and eat rice with our fingers and be at one with our ancestors who have done it for thousands of years. The servant will pour water, fragrant with roses, over our hands from a silver vessel and we shall be as clean as any European. She will laugh, and I shall laugh too, at the habits of our mothers; that must be, for we are obliged to progress, even if it hurts the old, but we will not laugh too unkindly.'

The last few years, owing to the influence of the present Shah, life has become very different for the Parsees, as the Moslems can no longer crush and look down upon this old community. Until the new régime began Parsees were allowed to have only low walls over which everyone could look, so many a pretty Parsee girl was seen by a Moslem and forced to become his wife, either permanent or temporary. Although she moved only a very short distance away, she lost her people and was generally despised by the family into which she was introduced; in a few years divorce often turned her on to the street, for her people would not have her back.

Some Persians desire to return to the ethical and religious but not the ceremonial teaching of Zoroastrianism, which is purely Persian, believing that it is Moslem influence which has given them their habits of lying, laziness, procrastination and cruelty to animals. The Vendidad gave particular instructions that dogs and other domestic animals should have care and protection.

I felt that this attitude was very unfair, for Persia, indeed the whole of Europe, owes a considerable amount of its civilization to Arab influence. I suggested to a Persian the possibility that Zoroaster's insistence upon truthfulness was necessary because the people were liars even in his time. There are young people who are reading the Gathas carefully and conscientiously, although much is no longer comprehensible and all that is good has been used by later religions or philosophers. What they call 'the civilized conscience' knows all that is socially useful in Zoroastrianism.

There are probably not more than 12,000 Parsees in Persia, so that numerically they are not important, but their women will probably be free before the Moslems, and as they are a people of considerable physical strength, mental ability, unusual industry and, instead of being despised, are now almost respected as the preservers of the original Persian, pre-Arabian religion, they may have a considerable influence.

No one yet knows what use the Parsees will make of the 2000-year-old, tri-partite Zoroastrian slogan:

'Think good, speak good, do good'.

At Yezd I visited two girls schools run by the Bahais because the government would not provide enough. The head of the first school was an unmarried woman who had a married assistant. I sat talking to them in the small, neat, clean and charming courtyard while we had cold sherbet in bright yellow glasses that stood on glass plates and cucumbers which were dipped into iced vinegar. When a Bahais man appeared the children over eight raced away to get their *chadars*, which were neatly folded up on shelves. The teachers said that Bahallullah had wished the veil to be abolished, but they thought that neither men nor women were yet ready and that it would be ten to twenty years before either could look at the other without lascivious and passionate thoughts.

The students in one class were sitting round an octagonal pool in which goldfish were carrying on an anti-mosquito crusade. The pupils belonged to all the local sects, but most of them had a leather case with a charm round their necks, some of the cases green to make them yet more effective.

The other Bahais school, equally neat and tidy, was run by a remarkable woman, Hadji Bibi Sorghra, whose face was thin, refined, full of eager enthusiasm. She very early became a widow and, having no children, went, in spite of her relations, to Tehran, where she lived with a Bahais family and attended school. That was fifteen years ago when the caravan took twelve days to do the journey. When she returned she realized how badly a school was needed in her own town and started one herself. Now she can do more because helped by Bahais funds, but she said pathetically:

'I am sorry we are doing so little. I learnt too long ago to be modern or to know much.

'Bahallullah said mankind had two wings, one was man, and one was

woman, and it could not fly without both. I know by my life that that is true, but in Persia to-day few know that, so that my country goes slowly.'

I was sorry that I had to go on to Kerman without seeing her again, for she was like a flower that had never had an opportunity to open.

*On the face of the earth there is no place like Kerman;
Kerman is the heart of the world and we are men of heart.*

• I •

KERMAN

I WENT from Yezd to Kerman in a goods-lorry, a very instructive, cheap and uncomfortable journey.

My suit-case tumbled off periodically, I constantly fell asleep, and, to my horror, waked to find my head on the chauffeur's shoulder. Once I put out my hand to catch what I supposed was a falling parcel. There was a terrifying shriek. I had taken hold of the trousers of the mechanic, who, having found the top too hot, was attempting to descend. That little incident travelled about Persia much faster than I did.

What a relief when the chauffeur pointed ahead and said 'Kerman', for we were eight hours late. I could not see a city or anything else for we were in the middle of a bad sand-storm. We reached the garage at 2 p.m. when everyone was sleeping, stretched out on floors, benches and chairs. Never again do I wish to see so many dirty, untidy and slovenly people. Nobody wanted to be disturbed, even to telephone for a car to take me to the British consulate, for there was no hotel.

At last a car bumped me to the far end of the town where the consulate, partly built by Sir Percy Sykes, stands amidst trees. The chauffeur tried to increase the price by 400 per cent., but didn't succeed more than 200 per cent. If he had only waited until I had walked into the garden I wouldn't have protested, as I was so happy to see a lawn, a real lawn, and arches with crimson ramblers. The only time in Persia that I was seriously homesick was when, an hour later, I heard a lawn mower. But that sadness passed when Captain Lincoln appeared. During the weeks I lived at Kerman he was a marvellous host. I put him and the Bakhtiari Ameer together in a special niche reserved for the Saints of Hospitality. Those two men, of such different races, training and experience, were alike in never finding anything too much bother and no detail too small that might make their guests happy and comfortable. The cook at the consulate was worthy of his master. He

always greeted guests with 'Welcome' arranged on the pudding, and one day when queen-pudding had been ordered he sent up an apple charlotte with 'Queen Pudding Forget' piped on the top.

Kerman, like Yezd, was brown, unbeautiful and, at the moment, very dusty, because the excellent governor was busy making some new roads to let light, cleanliness and civic ideals into the lives of the people.

But Kerman was humanly interesting: it had one of the few endowed hospitals and orphanages, one of the very few kindergarten schools, a welfare-centre run by the English mission and more football clubs in proportion to its population than any city in Persia!

Noorala Khan gave a building and enough land to provide for ten beds, but there are now fifteen. Some people say the gift was the result of annoyance with his relations, and others that his last long illness had made him realize the financial difficulties of the sick poor. Whatever the cause of its origin, the hospital is doing good work. It was run in July, 1933, by a Persian doctor, educated in Bombay, who, unfortunately, had only sufficient instruments for simple operations. He was enthusiastic but somewhat depressed because he could do so little when the need was so great; owing to limited space he could take only clean gynaecological cases and had to put tubercular patients into a general ward. He had tried to persuade people to subscribe even small sums, so that he could build a new ward, but that type of charity is, unfortunately, still incomprehensible to most Moslems. Only the Zoroastrians and Bahais have any idea of organized charity.

On account of the shortage of properly qualified doctors, the government six years ago created a lower-class qualification, *Tabib Majas*, given for an examination which can be taken after a man has been doing nursing, anæsthetics, dispensing and clinical work for ten years in a hospital and in general practice. The hospital and general work may go on coincidentally. There were twelve of these men in Kerman doing something to alleviate the misery, but they all complained that they earned little because their patients were so reluctant to pay. I visited several of their offices; on the floor lay dirty cotton wool and lint that had been removed from wounds. One doctor wiped a blood-covered scalpel on his coat sleeve before lancing a patient; another kept a pet sheep which wandered into the surgery and left souvenirs. The *Tabib Majas* picked them up with his fingers, as he thought a European would not consider them clean, and proceeded to examine a pregnant woman. If he had been a strict Moslem such a proceeding would have been impossible. 'What makes me ashamed', said an old Persian doctor,

'is that I see Moslemic cleanliness being carried out by the cursed Christian missionaries and we forget'.

The hospital doctor deeply regretted that there was no medical society or professional spirit in Kerman, or anywhere in Persia, to create co-ordination in medical work, no educated public opinion to alter the sanitary arrangements of the town, where a pit was dug for a w.c. and when full was merely covered over and another dug near, quite regardless of the proximity of the wells.

The population of Persia to-day is about twelve million people, reckoned by the amount of flour eaten, for no real census has ever been taken, but it is believed that six hundred years ago the district of Khorasan alone contained as many inhabitants as the whole of Persia to-day. Near Kerman is the mountain town of Giraf, once a large city with a large silk industry, the silk being exported to India. But the reservoir broke and to-day the town is only a dangerous ruin, for the water now makes a mosquito-infested marsh. This is just one of many ruins. The population has been reduced by emigration. Many Zoroastrians, or Parsees, have gone to India, which has ten times as many as in all Persia; there are said to be 700,000 Persians in Iraq. There is a high infantile death rate, due chiefly to dysentery, gonorrhœa, smallpox and congenital syphilis.

It is hoped that smallpox vaccination will be compulsory in two years and also satisfactory, as vaccine is now prepared in Tehran. Arm to arm vaccination still spreads syphilis. Twenty years ago it was thought that anyone who looked at a syphilitic patient would become infected and in some districts they were sent to remote villages where they had to look after one another. Theoretically all Persian cities have a doctor to examine, for venereal diseases, all workers who deal with foods. I know they exist and do their best in Tehran and Ispahan.

The orphanage was very interesting, having been started by a Persian with his own funds and run by his own sympathy and ability. He took boys of four years and kept them until they could find work, teaching them carpet-weaving and carpentry and sending them to the government schools. The boys lived in rooms round the courtyard, under the simplest conditions, but were clean, well fed and had an invaluable personal relationship with this man, who had the face of a saint. There is so little organized charity in Persia that an institution like this is an oasis in the terrible desert of mendicity.

The bazaars at Kerman were not very interesting and certainly depressing, for here too Persians had an exaggerated liking for anything

European and are replacing native beauty by Western ugliness. Also, because they had no taste or knowledge, the richer would buy anything just because it was expensive. An honest merchant said, pathetically, 'When I was in Germany I bought all these shoes cheap, after a fire. But no one would buy them until I increased the price by 200 per cent. The profit I am making is not right.'

I saw more opium smokers at Kerman than anywhere except at Qum, yet everyone agreed that smoking had decreased and it is against the law to smoke in public. I once had to walk through the bazaars at 11 p.m. when nearly all the shops were shut, but at not very distant intervals men and boys were lying about under the influence of the drug. I then understood there must be truth in the assertion that the Kerman bazaar opens several hours later than is usual in Persia because the men haven't recovered from the night before.

Although one Persian doctor said that smoking had decreased from 80 per cent. of men and 40 per cent. of women ten years ago to 5 per cent. today, a European doctor in the same town said the reduction was 33 per cent. If a man smokes, his wife often smokes also, but if only she smokes, she tries to hide it from her husband. The worst offenders are said to be the Bakhtiari tribes. Certainly the rich smoke more to excess than the poor, for the price has gone up 400 per cent. A considerable proportion of the chauffeurs along the most dangerous roads smoke in small amounts to steady their nerves, and many beggars are *habitués*. A beggar complained that it was now difficult to get enough alms to feed him and to supply the two krans for opium (nearly a day's wage for the average unskilled labourer) to keep him happy.

Opium is used extensively to quiet the baby and is the only method of committing suicide, which is far less frequent than in Europe. Some suicides are believed to be unintentional, when husbands and wives take what they do not think will be fatal, but enough 'to larn him (or her) a lesson'.

The young people are certainly smoking much less, for opium to excess has such a bad effect that there is a definite propaganda to discourage it. Moderate smoking apparently does no more harm than tobacco in Europe, provided the teeth are kept scrupulously clean, but it is difficult to be moderate. Even the great Browne, the most intelligent European traveller in Persia, was becoming an opium-slave when he was recalled to Europe.

Persia is in the curious position that it would like to reduce smoking

at home but, at the same time, increase its export to other countries, for, whether opium is good or bad, it has a considerable economic importance to its merchants and agriculturists. Opium is one of the largest exports and 5000 cases are sent away annually.

The cases leave the country in ships of various nations but, on account of international conventions, no British ship will take opium without a special permit from the country to which it is destined to go. British merchants in Persia will sell opium to anyone without a permit if it does not go in a British boat, and at times do a considerable trade with Japan and China. It may be true that the principal smuggling into China is done by the officers on the Chinese patrol boats which are preventing (*sic*) the landing of opium on the coast! Macao, a Portuguese settlement about sixty miles from Hong Kong, is a flourishing gambling and opium-smoking hell which can, under permit, import 500 cases per annum. As this is, however, inadequate to supply the visitors who come to Macao daily to indulge in an orgy, sailing down from Hong Kong, the successful smuggler can get double the market-price for his cases.

Persian opium is some of the best in the world, that from the district of Khorasan having a morphine content of 10 to 11 per cent. and a flavour much preferred by connoisseurs. It was because the Persians over-estimated the popularity of their opium that the big tax was put on in spite of the advice of skilled observers who had a world reputation. But they are too clever a people not to learn from their mistakes.

The chief rival is Turkish opium, whose morphine is never more than 8 per cent. but whose price is so much less than the Persian that it is cutting the latter out. Opium smokers, however, like wine drinkers, are frequently deceived by labels, so Persian merchants are sending skilled blenders to Anatolia and putting on their own labels.

In the great province of Fars, in the south-west of Persia, opium is 60 per cent. of the agricultural produce, Fars and Shiraz being the biggest opium centres, but here the opium never contains more than 7 or 8 per cent. of morphine. The large fields of opium poppies are gay when the colours are mixed, innocent and charming when all the flowers are white, but somewhat sinister when a dull purple. In the sun the smell is penetrating and unpleasant.

Two kinds of poppies are grown, one sown in the autumn, which takes eight months to reach maturity, and the other sown in the spring,

which requires only three months. The seeds are broadcast, the plants thinned, carefully weeded and the opium obtained by scoring the poppy heads. The labour during the collecting period is considerable. Oil is now extracted from the seeds and used for making soap and as cooking fat for poor peasants, who also dry and burn the stalks as fuel. Nothing is wasted and the ground is so little exhausted that cereals follow the poppy after five months of fallow. The poppy has an immense agricultural advantage over cotton, for its growing period coincides with the time when water is plentiful, therefore cheap, and requires water to be run into the irrigation channels only five times during its growth. *Gundede*, a tasteless gum collected from wild plants, is used to mix with the opium to reduce the percentage of morphine to a desired standard.

Opium growing is controlled by the government, each cultivator having to pay a tax, and each has, through the head of the village, the *Kha Khoda*, to let the local authorities know what area he proposes to put under poppies, and thus, as the amount of opium produced per acre is known approximately, local smuggling is reduced. The internal tax is much smaller than the export tax, but the price of opium has nevertheless gone up considerably. All opium goes to a bonded warehouse and is sold only by registered retailers.

Cotton can be grown only in summer, when water is both scarce and expensive. As, however, with the Shah's new policy of industrial development, it is hoped that Persia will grow the cotton necessary to replace the present goods from Japan, Russia, India and England, there are great plans for increasing the water supply. It is believed that by tapping the source of the Karun River part of its water may be diverted from its journey to the Mohammerah district, at the top of the Persian Gulf, thus being used to increase the volume of the Zeyendah River and so water adequately the cotton fields of the Ispahan plain and make electricity to run the cotton mills and the proposed iron-works.

Opium and cotton production are closely related, but whether the one can, in the future, replace the other depends almost entirely upon changes in the water supply.

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The most beautiful religious school in Persia, the Madressah Za'hira-Dola, opens off the bazaar. To step from the noisy, dirty, stinking bazaar into that clean, beautiful garden was indeed going from Babel to peace, but the education at the school does not equal in excellence the

beauty of the building with its fine tiles, delicate stucco work, exquisite wooden windows and open-work linen curtains.

It was very difficult to get about Kerman as there was only one *droscha* in the town, the few cars were appallingly bad and to walk between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. in June was to court disaster. Because the chauffeur made a mistake, I had to walk a mile to the school run by the Bahais. I arrived dusty and tired out, but everything unpleasant was forgotten when I looked at the charming Persian woman, immaculately clean and tidy, and her thirty happy, clean pupils. She was a widow with three children, who had studied modern methods in Turkestan and had come to Persia after the Russian revolution.

The children were from two to six years of age, paying only two *rials* a month, the local community of Bahais subscribing the remainder of the expenses. Each child had its own towel and on arrival washed its hands and nails and had its head examined. That doesn't sound much in Europe, but in Kerman it took your breath away. No corporal punishment was allowed; if a child did not behave, after being given several chances, it was sent away. That attitude of kindness to one another, of kindness to animals, the teaching that blows are not the only way to manage, was really startling in a land where corporal punishment, although theoretically abolished in the schools, was still considered the only practical discipline.

The children danced as they sang:

*We are children of the twentieth century,
We go to school every day,
We learn Persian,
We are the children of the future,
We must be clean and honest for our country's sake.*

Those children were gay and jolly, they all had shoes, most of them had stockings and they were learning to use a handkerchief. They would not, like their parents, feel it necessary to wipe their noses on every post. That would make a pleasanter Persia! I suddenly realized that the inventor of handkerchiefs had been one of the world's greatest benefactors. Again the children walked in a circle, singing:

*We are the children of the school,
We are like flowers in a garden.
We go out into the garden
To play and to run,*

*To use our watering cans and dig with spades.
We must be brothers and sisters,
Learning together in a class,
Wearing the same brown uniform.*

I did not want to leave this place of happiness and hope, to go into the streets where the children's eyes were covered with flies, where their habits were cruel or disgusting.

Persia needs schools like this but has not the teachers and will not have foreigners. An excellent school of this type, with a clever Russian teacher, was shut up at Shiraz because, according to the new law, only a Persian can teach young children. They told me a Persian woman would take his place.

'Is she trained?' I asked.

'Oh, no; that is not necessary. She is very bright and will know what to do.'

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Another day the consular car took me along the dusty, irregular roads and into the narrow lanes until it could go no farther. I got out and walked through the alleys, where one tall mud wall cast a shadow and the other reflected the intense heat. At last two iron-studded wooden doors opened and there was the blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked Englishwoman who was the head of the Kerman Welfare-Centre and Maternity Clinic. The nurses looked at me eagerly, for I had just come from the rich land which had brought them so much comfort and from the city of Birmingham which had given recent special help.

'Is Birmingham as big and rich as Kerman?' asked one. What could I answer when perhaps only 2 per cent. of Kerman's population of 50,000 was not miserably poor and ignorant.

'It can't have anything as beautiful as our new avenue', said another proudly.

The Shah says, 'Let there be avenues', and straight as an arrow destruction pierces its way through old houses and gardens, a limited compensation is paid for the destroyed buildings and the people go somewhere, but a motor way is made, a breathing space, which becomes a new civic ideal. The slums still hide behind the avenues, just as they do everywhere in the world.

The Englishwoman, the Persian nurse and I made our way, not along an avenue but down narrow alleys, past stinking heaps of rubbish, past innumerable beggars in loathsome rags, some loquacious

and insistent, some only heaps upon the ground, bare toes protruding at one end and one or two eyes blinking under torn caps or patched *chadars* at the other; past little shops where there were more flies than sugar, more smells than meat, more rotten fruit than good. I was glad beyond words to be living at the end of the city in that clean English consulate.

'Bend low or you'll hit your head', and we went along a narrow passage into a tiny courtyard out of which there opened two great alcoves, which were used as summer rooms, and two carpet factories. In one corner was the well, a short distance away was the lavatory, only a hole in the ground covered at the end of the year, when another was dug, and on a rug in the far corner lay a man in a pair of ragged trousers and a torn shirt. He had typhoid, his wife sat on one side fanning away the flies and his mother on the other holding a fat baby with a skin disease.

The welfare patient, with her six-day baby, lay on a *doshak*, a thin mattress of wool, placed upon the dry mud floor. She wore her day clothes: a pair of black trousers, a cotton dress, a net over her hair. She had no others. Her muslin *chadar* was a sheet. Her relations, two shabby women and her two children—the five hens must not be forgotten—were running about, busy boiling water in the samovar, bringing the basin to wash the baby and the sterilized bowl to wash the mother.

The Englishwoman and I sat on a rug on one side of the patient and the nurse, having taken off her street clothes and put on a clean apron, sat down also on the floor to wash the baby. She had been trained for two years, could attend a simple straightforward birth alone, but the Englishwoman knew she could only be kept up to standard by constant supervision. She and the other three nurses were married, for Moslem convention demanded that of women who went about at all times of the day and night.

The eldest nurse had three children to support because her husband had left her for a younger woman; the second had to keep her children because her husband was an opium smoker; the third, having five children, the youngest only three months, worked because her husband's wages were so small. She nursed her baby every morning before she came on duty at seven, a neighbour acted as wet nurse in the middle of the morning and when her work was over, at twelve, she went home to feed the baby and the other children. The centre gave her a free month before and after the baby was born, with full pay. Such a proceeding was unprecedented and her friends could only explain such quixotic behaviour as due to the great riches of England. But the

centre will, in time, help the people to understand the ethical ideas at the back of that simple help. The fourth nurse is only eighteen; the baby she had at sixteen died and, having got rid of a bad husband, she is now giving herself wholeheartedly to the work.

When in their homes the nurses have to be ready to be called at any time except half a day a week and one Sunday a month. As wages go in Kerman, where sweating is universal, they do quite well, as they also get their uniform and laundry.

Whilst the Englishwoman had been talking about her assistants the nurse had picked up the miserable baby, dressed in gay calicos, a bonnet, its legs tightly bound in half a dozen rags. If the people only had money enough to buy a basket and fly-nets, the children need, in summer, wear little, but these wrappings do at least keep away the pestilential flies. In winter the rooms are miserably cold, for windows, as big as doors, don't fit and the only fire is a few bits of charcoal.

The centre has given unbelievable comfort to its patients, with peace and cleanliness at birth and the daily visit for ten days after.

The weekly meeting of the clinic is slowly making the women realize that children are born to grow up, not merely to die before a year is out, and so is developing a more intelligent type of love.

This second woman was desperately poor, for her husband, a baker, had gone to a country village for a job whilst she stayed in her father's house. Kerman lives on carpets and just now the world is not buying. Another carpet-firm goes smash in London or New York and the poor of Kerman first drop the tiny piece of curd cheese that helps down the bread and then look round for bread.

The baby bathed—the Englishwoman very firmly refused to allow the mother to feed the baby in the middle because it cried—the mother made comfortable, we walked down more dirty streets to a home that was a little better. This woman had a bolster with a white cover, a servant, a special little mattress for the baby and not only the usual charms but also a silver crescent in its cap. But it was a sad house, for the woman had had eight babies, all dead, and was desperately anxious to keep this miserable creature alive. The tears poured out of her great brown eyes because its leg had swollen again. Time after time she kissed it passionately. This being the tenth and last visit, the mother watched carefully that she might bathe the baby in a really 'foreign' way when to-morrow came.

'Will it die?' she asked over and over again. 'It is a boy, my husband wants it to live. Perhaps I can't have any more children.'

'You and your husband should both go to hospital'—the expression on her face said they were afraid; instead, she would probably buy a holy prayer and hang it round her neck. Illness and ignorance, ignorance and illness, in a land where the sky is blue, the air so soft and nature willing to give abundantly to the industrious and the intelligent.

The last visit was to the house of a rich woman who paid the centre, but not enough. Her courtyard was a garden, cool and pleasant, but her baby was just as unhygienically dressed as the others. She had lost three children out of five and those that remained were girls—that was her tragedy. She cried, she could take no interest in this she-child although it was healthy and well. After the bath the baby was put into the velvet hammock which is the local cot, and the servant began to rock violently.

'That is bad for baby', said the Englishwoman.

'It does not matter', answered the woman. 'Can't you tell me how to have a boy, then I would follow out all your good instructions carefully, and pay you double.'

We turned again into the dusty way, but the nurse had become talkative.

'It will be a long time before we cease to be savages but things are better even in two years. Please visit us on Friday when the children and women weavers come to have tea, to skip and jump. I am giving them a talk on cleanliness, and so life will change in Persia.'

Carpets are the glory and the burden of Persia, especially of Kerman, but at the moment the city has much unemployment, for the only market is America. Nearly all the weaving is done by children and young women. Conditions were at one time appalling, but are so much improved that in the modern rooms there are light, air and a proper place for resting the feet. During the three or four years that a child is learning the parents get a few pounds a year, but even when they are skilful and can work direct from the pattern the wage is rarely more than that of an unskilled labourer. Everywhere there is piece-work. To-day the most unhealthful part of the process is done by men, who sit on the ground shearing the carpets to make them smooth, with enormous specially shaped scissors. The men bend close over their work and inhale the rough fluff.

In certain parts of the town many houses have one or more rooms set up with looms, a large number belonging to the same merchant. No weaving is done on a large scale. The whole town revolves round carpets,

spinning, dyeing and weaving. It is impossible to spend half an hour in the city without seeing a child carrying yarn, a porter doubled up under the weight of a great carpet on his back. Until thirty years ago Paisley shawls were made in Kerman and a few brocades and velvets, but even silk carpets are now rare.

One firm, with a big international trade, has an excellent establishment for designing carpets and experimenting with dyes, which all have to be natural, on pain of a large fine. Each city and district has its own traditional designs but the tendency is to make whatever can be sold. Persia still turns out fine technique but the taste of buyers differs, and some of the results of combining Eastern and Western motives, making pictures of buyers, historical scenes and zoological gardens, are very trying.

One of the designers was a keen wrestler and through him I arranged a visit to a local wrestling club. It was unheard of for a woman to go to such a club, so many excuses were found to make a visit impossible, it being stated that the clubs were only for the lower classes. In Kerman the clubs were very popular, not primarily to develop a perfect man but to produce a successful wrestler.

Wrestling has been, from very old times, one of the principal sports of Persia. There were polo and hunting for the rich, but wrestling was cheap, indeed might even be a source of income if a wrestler was appointed to a rich khan or the Shah. The present Shah is not particularly interested in this sport, but wrestlers are still kept by a number of Indian princes.

I got up at four o'clock, as I had to walk just over three miles to the club. The stars had all disappeared but the sun had not yet risen when I started from beyond the outskirts of the town. I was a little alarmed at going along the empty roads but, as the gate-keeper couldn't find a stick, I grasped my parasol by the middle and decided to put up a fight if anyone was unpleasant. I had taken the precaution to put a little jacket over my bare arms and strode along in the masculine manner which generally petrified the natives.

It was thirty-five minutes' hard walking to the lane where I was picked up by the designer; of course he was late, as is usual in Persia, but only by forty minutes. I sat at the corner of an alley and fifteen yards away was another corner, so that those who came along saw me suddenly. I wondered why they all spat just there—it was so like dogs that I smiled—but suddenly I realized, when I saw the expression on

the face of an old mullah, that I was the accursed foreigner and they were showing their opinion in the usual way.

The wrestler, also a Moslem, was quite friendly when he did arrive. He was handsome, well shaved, with a small smart moustache and clothes that were tidy, although not in the least pressed. A quarter of an hour brought us to the club, which was a domed room, most of the floor space being taken by an octagonal pit, three feet-six deep, surrounded by narrow ledges covered with matting. At one side was a small space where the audience stood and where, on a ledge, sat the servant-musician. Next to him were a bowl of charcoal with a teapot containing hot water for the athletes, a heap of neatly folded red and blue plaid towels such as are used in the baths, and in his lap a *dombek*.

They placed a chair for me, specially brought to the club for the foreigner; each man stripped to his under-drawers, made of white cotton material with a black stripe, which are like pyjamas that have never quite grown up. Over these they arranged the plaid towel by means of clever ties and twists.

The first exercise, called the Swim, was twisting themselves, when almost lying on the floor, their hands holding a piece of wood twenty inches long, raised two inches from the floor. As they moved in unison they called aloud:

'Ya, Ali; God protect us', and the servant made not musical but rhythmical sounds on the drum. I at once got my camera ready, but 'No, no', said the chief wrestler, a large fat man. 'We cannot appear in the cinema. I would not like this', and he took hold of a large mass of hair on his chest, 'to appear on the screen'. I wanted to tell him that nobody would particularly want to see it.

When they were busy exercising the servant indicated that I should take a photo, but I hadn't enough Persian to explain that that wasn't the game. They continued with one exercise after another for one and a half hours, sometimes each man alone, sometimes in groups, the leader criticizing or giving an exemplary display. They did a good many foot-exercises, gave much attention to twirling, so violently and for so long a time that the men standing at the edge were ready to catch the performers when exhausted. Some of the movements were like those of the Russian ballet. My guide, when stripped, was well set up and as graceful as any dancer I have ever seen. He and another young man never made a false movement; like all the others, had the shoulder and arm muscles too well developed, but they alone were not round shouldered.

They were very able with the Indian clubs, the heaviest weighing thirty pounds. This society does not admit men under twenty-two, as the work is so strenuous.

The two chief wrestlers, fat heavy men of great muscular strength but entirely lacking in grace, each wore a tight-fitting skull cap, the *arak-chin* (the collector of perspiration). The thinner men had a very charming exercise in which they almost danced across the pit and, without giving themselves any distance, jumped up on the ledge and down again in a trice. It was like the movement of the moufflon from their own mountains.

I stayed on, seeing exercises repeated, getting terribly wearied by the drum but hoping a photograph would be possible. Finally the leader said one might be taken. But what a babel! Some of them looked at me in a very unpleasant manner, one tried to take my camera, others smiled, especially the two handsome young men, so I waited quietly, but when the angry men started calling upon Ali and Khudah I knew all was not well. Some of the men were very annoyed with one another, my guide looked a little nervous, the situation wasn't very pleasant, but by some good fortune I caught the eye of the leader and gave him a smile which I hoped was a mixture of a ba-lamb and a siren. Anyway, he smiled in return and after he'd made a little speech there was silence, and soon they were all busily twirling again. At times a man spat, not on the floor, but under the mats. It was a hygienic advance, but I did wonder how they dealt with the mats.

The floor of the pit was very springy, as it was made of special cement placed on top of a thick layer of branches. Each time the men moved, the floor obviously gave and little cracks appeared in the cement.

The youngest man next picked up the *kabbadahm*, an iron bow whose string is represented by many iron rings, some free, which give, when the apparatus is moved, clear musical notes. It was a pleasant and graceful exercise.

At last the wrestling began. The opponents took hands and, giving a quaint sudden pull, touched each other, right shoulder to right shoulder, before the bout began. None lasted long and when they finished the men touched each other on the right brow, the right cheek, pretended to kiss or did kiss each other, full upon the lips. In the intervals some of the men stood close together, their hands clasped or their arms about each other.

In one bout the chief wrestler lost his temper with the young graceful man and dashed at him like a wild bull, throwing him on the ground

as if he weighed nothing. The leader parted them, everyone laughed but the big man was severely criticized.

Finally the two chief men had a bout which lasted for a long time, during which they did fine feats of strength and endurance. I was very disappointed that neither wore the *tuniki*, the padded and ornamental big trousers which, I learned, were kept for special occasions and must be worn only by the best man.

The morning exercise was over and the men went off to their offices and shops. The apparently lazy Persians do strenuous exercises but the wave of enthusiasm for physical fitness and sport will modify, very considerably, the traditional exercises, which are not only too great a strain on heart and lungs, but produce an unsymmetrical man.

As we passed the high brown hills where there are remains of the old forts, the Ardeshir and the Dochta (or daughter), the wrestler told these tales:

The governor of the city lived in Fort Ardeshir and his daughter in Fort Dochta. She fell in love with an officer but was not allowed to marry him, so that they had a tunnel, sixty miles long, made between her castle and his home. One day, when visiting the princess, he killed the king; they were married and ruled Kerman together.

Another story relates that at one time a strong and gigantic princess lived in the fort. She married one young man after another, but so captivated them by her beauty that it was quite easy to kill them when she was satiated. The Imam Hassan wished to have Kerman, so somehow managed to have her married to an old man, who, having experience of women, did not lose his head, and at the right moment plunged a dagger into her throat, just under her lovely chin. Imam Hassan then easily conquered the city, but there was no peace until his courtiers had a number of duels in the Jabalia, the only stone building in Kerman. There, men of three sizes, those who reached to the first windows, to the second and to the top (perhaps forty feet), fought with opponents of their own size.

That there really were giants in those days is proved by a grave, recently found on the hill, which contained a big bone measuring six feet from toe to knee, and a tooth that was six inches long!

How mighty was the Dochta princess!

We walked on to the plain where there are so many ruins of past cities, where the mountain has a hideous great white writing 'Hail, Ali!' and where at the place sacred to the fairies the peasants hang rags on a

tree and sacrifice cocks by the well, that these unseen beings may help them in their troubles.

Hidden in Kerman is a rich store of valuable Aryan folklore which should be collected before it is swept away on a wave of unbalanced Westernization.

Vast numbers of Zoroastrians are supposed to have lived in these ruined cities. It is said that the Afghans, knowing they left their houses for five days before the new year, came in their absence, destroyed the houses and turned upon the defenceless people.

Out beyond the ruins stretched the long miles of *khadars*, those mounds of earth which surround the openings into the underground waterways, or *ghannats*.

There are four types of villages and towns in Persia: in, or a little way up, the mountains there is the village depending upon a spring or a stream; near, or a short way from, the base of the mountain is the village supplied with wells, and out in the plains, which make up a large part of the high Persian plateau, are towns whose water comes in *ghannats*, crossing the desert for distances as great as fifty-seven miles. The fourth type is down at sea level, where the water comes from both wells and rain, the latter being collected in deep cement pits.

To make a *ghannat*, a man, the *maghanghi*, locates water, preferably in a valley with deep slopes and an easy outlet, or just at the bottom of a hill, and sinks a shaft, even as deep as 300 feet, to a water-bearing stratum. With the aid of simple but efficient instruments he works out the angle of the slope necessary to take the water from the bottom of the shaft to its destination, the ideal condition being that the water should reach the surface upon arriving at the town. Shafts are then dug at intervals of about thirty yards between the source and the town, their depth varying from a few feet upwards. The depth of each has to be calculated carefully in order that there should be a proper flow. The shafts and the sides and roof of the tunnels do not fall in, because the earth is frequently very hard and most of the year very dry. The *ghannat* cannot always go the most direct route to the town, as it is necessary to avoid loose earth and sand, but pipes are at times laid in such places to avoid a too-long detour. The shafts are 'blinded' with wood covered with earth and stones in order to keep out the hot sun and the surface water. It is much better, if possible, to have a short *ghannat*, as the expense of keeping them efficient is great. Out in the desert, twenty miles or more from anywhere, you may find the *ghannat*-worker, his family

and a dreadful wild dog, living in a tent, while shaft after shaft is cleaned.

The labour of keeping the *ghannats* in condition is enormous, for men must periodically go down and dig up the earth that has fallen in, so that there may be no hindrance to the flow. The workers have a special wheel with rope attached (*kambar*) by which they pull up wet mud. As a result of the constant cleaning, the top of each shaft is gradually surrounded by a big circle of earth which shows the track of the *ghannats* across the country. Too frequently the source dries up or changes take place in the tunnels, so that the *ghannat* becomes useless and another has to be made. They are very costly; one of twenty-one miles which started at a depth of ninety feet recently cost 55,000 *tomans* (about £6,900), whilst the village which it supplied, having houses, etc., for 700 people and factories for eighty great carpet-loom, cost only 25,000 *tomans*.

The *ghannat* may belong to one or more persons, the water being shared, each owner having water for the exact number of hours and minutes proportional to the money invested. The peasants generally have no watches, but they know quite accurately the time the water should run on to their land. In the city of Ispahan there have been so many disputes that there is a special official, the Madi Salart. In the country districts they are either settled by the head of the village or the oldest peasant. Sometimes there is a law suit, sometimes black eyes, or even murder, but usually the matter is arranged amicably. Anyone can buy *ghannats* or a right in them just as they buy land, a deed passing from the old to the new owner. There are *ghannats* which have been in the same family for three hundred years and they have frequently given a name to a village, Khan-noo, the Little *Ghannat*, but the word *ghannat* appears also in the forms *khad*, *kakoriz*, *karez*.

Buying a *ghannat* or part-right may be a very paying proposition when the water is rented by the hour or by the area of land watered. The chief difficulty arises when it needs cleaning, as some of the owners may refuse to spend the necessary money. At death, rights are left in the same way as any other possession and fathers may make a *ghannat*-right a part of a girl's dowry. When a man buys a garden or a village he has to be very careful about the possession of water-rights, the conditions of the *ghannats*, and must take great care to see that the deeds are correct.

In 1932, near Kerman, where the twenty-nine-mile *ghannat* comes from the district of Mahun, there was a sudden storm, the water rushed

into the shafts, two *ghannats* were destroyed, so that several villages and much land became desert again. The owners were entirely impoverished and the only chance of recovering the land was by having aid from the Agricultural Bank or the government at Tehran. Since this terrible experience the Kermani hope that they may have a reservoir instead of the more primitive *ghannats*.

It is a curious and very impressive sight to be travelling over the desert, utterly dry and unbearably hot, and come upon not one but as many as twenty lines of *khadars*, which indicate that, somewhere deep below, the water is running or has run. The desert is so hopeless but underneath are life-giving streams. The only growing plants are a few grey-green, drought-resisting shrubs, but you know that somewhere, far out of sight, there is a village with green trees and fields, wheat and barley.

The cities of Yezd and Kerman, more than any others in Persia, are dependent upon *ghannat*-water; in the former the water is eighty or ninety feet under the city. In Kerman the water comes twenty miles, in Yezd fifty; there are dark openings in the streets which lead to steps, and they to the water below. Up those many steps the women have to bring water to their homes; it is no wonder Yezd is dirty. Some women do their laundry down in the darkness and one man was found washing his donkeys in a *ghannat* that was comparatively near the surface—but flowing water, they say in Persia, is quite good even when the donkey has had a bath.

A number of English estates, banks and consulates have their own *ghannats*; the advantage is obvious, as donkeys and laundresses are not admitted.

The oldest records of *ghannats* are seven hundred years; where and when they were invented, no one knows, but the labour they represent, both in the present and in the past, is enormous. There is nothing in Persia that gives a more intense realization of the antiquity of the country than these thousands of *khadars*, which impress even the stupid with a vivid realization of power and persistence.

Whilst snow is on the ground the water in the *ghannat* may be warm, and whilst the temperature above is freezing and all vegetation is dead, maidenhair ferns are growing happily in the moist warmth, fifty feet down. At least one species of fish lives in the *ghannats*, a dweller in darkness, blind but pleasant eating.

There is believed to be a loss of at least 33 per cent. between the source and outlet, so pipes are now being made to conduct the water

even through hard earth, but old ways die hard and the peasant is deeply suspicious of such new-fangled ideas.

Perhaps nothing is sadder in Persia than the many deserted villages, with crumbling mud walls and houses, surrounded by acres that had once been cultivated.

Water comes and goes, no one knows why, but when it goes man must move on.

As we neared the consulate the wrestler spoke of football and later sent me an enthusiast to talk about the game which was invented in England and has conquered the world.

It has conquered Persia too and is played all over the country, but, curiously, is very popular in this city, although Kerman is so far away from England, even 700 miles from Tehran, 265 miles from the nearest town, a very primitive city of 50,000 inhabitants, 5,680 feet high on the Persian plateau, surrounded by miles and miles of desert, the most isolated city in Persia.

Interest in football in this town at the edge of civilization was created by the South Persian Rifles (S.P.R.), a company of Persians officered by the British, who during their three years in Kerman started several clubs and gave a shield. Later, the English consul, Mr. G. H. D. Law, who was there for four years, encouraged the game among the Persians and gave a shield.

This year the best team in Kerman had a match with a very good team from Tehran, which took four days to cover, in a motor lorry, the long miles of mountains, plains and deserts. Kerman differs from many other towns which regard football as a game for boys but unworthy of men. The shields have played an important part in stimulating keenness, but owing to super-developed nationalism they have been given up because they are foreign. Their place was to be taken by a Persian cup, which unfortunately has not yet appeared.

The match was a great excitement: all the world turned up, the men in their best suits and the women hidden away behind the *chadar*, except for two eyes which kept a sharp look-out on all that happened.

The football field was hard brown earth, the surroundings were all brown and not far away were the rugged multi-coloured mountains.

The teams, in black shorts and white-and-black striped shirts, marched on to the field along the white side-line, the captain of each walking first, holding a large Victorian bouquet of flowers. When they reached the middle each team turned and they met in the centre of the

field. Arriving there, the captains exchanged bouquets and each shook hands with every man of the opposite side. The bouquets were then removed from the field; there was the usual toss for a side and the game began.

It was soccer, which is played all over Persia, in towns and tiny hamlets, by most of the schoolboys and a few men. And it was a smart game, fast, clean, intelligent, not by any means up to the best English standards but good and immensely hopeful for the future.

The ground where the spectators stood was very uneven and in the press some earth gave way and a man fell into a well. For a few moments the game went unwatched.

'Is he dead?' asked someone.

'No doubt of it', was the reply, but he went on, 'That was a good one. Hussein will be a fine back some day', and he clapped enthusiastically. The Persians, like keen spectators anywhere in the world, soon forgot an unfortunate incident in the excitement of the game. Death is accepted more calmly in the East than in the West.

Two doctors in white overalls, with a Persian notice on the front to say they were ambulance men, stood by with their little black bags and did first aid for two of the players. There were three umpires (Persians), one at each end and one in the middle, for although the Persians are learning fair play they haven't all got there yet. Too many cannot take a kick as an accident, so hit back, and at times there is an arranged attack on some special member of the opposing team who is known to be a particularly good player. The idea of team-spirit is growing, but on less important occasions than a match like this some men will not pass the ball. There was not complete satisfaction with the original umpires, so an Englishman was asked to be one on the second day. The governor of the province, a man of great importance and influence, entertained the visiting team and presented each member of the winning team with a gold medal, specially made for the occasion by local craftsmen.

Many Persian schools play football several times a week, not only for its physical value but because it is believed to be a fine education in learning to play 'fair', a quality which Persians know the boys lack but which they wish to create, as they have seen, in their contact with Europeans, both in Persia and in Europe, how much it means in creating better human relationships. Football is played from August till the end of May, although in August the field is often three inches deep in dust. The time in the day depends upon the temperature;

towards the end of the season the game begins at five o'clock and ends just before the darkness which comes on so rapidly in the semi-tropics.

A few years ago boys *would* come on the field wearing their hats, and have been known to take them off only when they thought they could get in a hit and replace them when they had given the ball a hard knock. The other day, while a match was going on, one boy constantly stood on his head or did other little gymnastic displays when the ball was on the other side of the field. In one town, where a school plays the local military team, the officers umpire in their smart, well-cut clothes, their curved swords dangling at their sides. The army is a firm believer that football, in spite of being a foreign game, will help to create the honourable, loyal youth that Persia needs and that the recruits, when returning to their towns and villages, will take with them the experience and enthusiasm which they gained during their two years in the army and so create still more clubs.

Kerman also has paper-chases, arranged by the Rais-i-Varzesh, the head of games, which usually go through the bazaars, starting at dawn.

Persia wants a fit nation and hence encourages football and other sports whenever possible.

• 2 •

BLOOD AND CARPETS IN THE DESERT

WE started at 6 a.m. just as the sun was coming over the mountains, when all the world was still beautiful and still kind.

The Persian's car was shabby, untidy, the wind-screen cracked and it was loaded with enormous, strange parcels. I sat next the Persian chauffeur and at the back were two men, one a local Kerman magnate who was a maker and seller of carpets, a man of affairs, almost as untidy as his car, for he hadn't shaved for at least four days, but his face was kind, his manners delightful. He had been to Europe and America on business, and was most entertaining in his dramatic descriptions of life in New York with its whizzing lifts and its crowded underground. He spoke only a word or two of English. The second man was a young Parsee, like many of his people fat and good-looking, but tidily dressed and well shaved. He had spent ten years in Europe, so spoke several languages.

We mountaineered over the awful roads and out into the desert,

which treated us kindly, for there was no sand-storm to spoil the clear air or shut out the beautiful mountains which surrounded the great flat plain.

We passed tiny villages with their spherical roofs, and in the fields here and there were small mud houses where the farmer temporarily stored his grain and gave shelter to the workers. Outside one village the corn was ripe and the fields were packed with workers, all with their own little knives. After it is cut the women-relations of the owner glean (one woman was even using a broom), then the donkeys, goats, sheep and camels eat, and finally the owner returns to collect the droppings of the animals for fuel! There's the apotheosis of saving—Europe compared with Persia is very wasteful.

At last, very thirsty and very hungry, we reached Ali-abad, the village made by Ali, where we had to get out because a small stream was in our way. The natives put down a temporary bridge, the fortress-like door of a stable, and over the car bumped. The people crowded about, as I was the first European who had ever come into their village. We made our way past the empty mud huts which were their homes, around loaded donkeys and a kicking horse, to a garden where pomegranates grew in abundance and a minute stream was bordered by bamboos and sunflowers. I put down my travelling cape but the natives brought a large carpet. In Persia carpets are capable of springing out of the desert, for it is the ambition of everyone to buy a carpet, as they are a gauge of success.

On one side was a field of poppies. The opium having been collected, the heads were waiting to be boiled to make a soothing drink and the stalk to make fuel. On the other side wheat was growing thick and golden.

Breakfast over, everyone in the village collected to study the strange foreigner. Oh, how close they came, but they were all friendly and smiling. A number of the women had the tribal mark between the eyes, but one had a trefoil design like that on the sword cases of some of the bas-reliefs of Persepolis. Everywhere in Persia, for those who see, are relics of a far-away past. Many of them were afraid of the camera, but the village-beauty was willing to pose and was just as coquettish as if she'd been in a London studio. Her clothes were rags and she didn't spend much on laundry but it would have been easy to write a poem about her eyes and her lovely hands. I put a coin into her hand, pressing her fingers over it so that none might see. See! Slowly that beautiful hand opened and a look of delectable happiness spread over her face

and over the faces of all the people near, except the rival beauty, who was much fairer, had an ornamental tattoo between her eyebrows and pleasantly rosy cheeks.

We had enjoyed them, they had enjoyed us; it was almost a pity to go and we would never know what she did with the money.

Again the desert, much hotter by now and without villages, but far away at the base of the mountains were, now and again, dark dots, which we knew were trees and therefore must shelter men and beasts. At one we reached our destination, Ahmad-abad, the village named after the magnate whose name was Ahmad. He had brought water in underground channels for twenty-one miles and built houses for seven hundred people, with a few shops, a mosque, a bath and nice factories for eighty carpet-loom, where there were light and air, coolness in summer, warmth in winter, arrangements for the workers to sit comfortably with their feet on the ground. These were model conditions, where children need not have rickets or girls distorted hips. The magnate was proud to bring me to his village. But profit as well as benevolence had suggested it, for the magnate was a big landowner and a farmer, who allowed no competitor to interfere with the selling of his produce. He paid the same rates to the workers as in the town, but houses and food were cheaper, so life was easier. 'The money goes out of one of his pockets and back into the other. He is very clever', said another carpet-merchant with great admiration.

At the entrance to the village stood a group of men, one holding a brown goat and one a short curved knife. Only one European, a Swede, had ever been in the village; they were more than a little excited at receiving a woman, so an offering had to be made. The goat's head was held on the ground, the sharp knife made a gash and there was blood—oh, how red, and oh, how much! I ought to have got out and had it splashed on to my shoes; but the magnate did not approve, so we drove on up the immense main street divided in two by a stream bordered by trees. It was his model village and those savages had spilt blood. The wide street was Western, the factories were Westernish, but his people were still of the East. There was the struggle between new and old which makes life in Persia to-day so interesting, so often tragic.

At the middle of the village another goat was sacrificed and there they compromised by putting blood on the tyres. The magnate looked distressed but I was delighted, for here was the real Persia of the Arabian Nights and Ali Baba; the past wasn't dead. I, knowing how much Western civilization has failed, was all excitement in the face of the

primitive, but he, sick at heart with all the horrors of the East and dreaming that the West would bring salvation, sat silent and morose in the back of the car.

I wanted to take a photograph of the dead goat but it might have upset the people by making them fear the Evil Eye. My coming would not be forgotten for years and if anything went seriously wrong, even years ahead, the people would blame the magnate for having brought the *farangi* woman.

As we drove up the street the people poured out of the houses and I felt it very jolly to be giving them such a good time. No famous music-hall artist ever gave more pleasure to her audience than I to those blue-clothed peasants. Their bright eyes took in every external detail and I knew by experience that they were longing to see what was underneath.

The house of the magnate was at the end of the village, surrounded by great gardens which produced pistachios principally, but also apples, pears, grapes and many vegetables.

We went into the long room whose walls were nearly all windows and doors, where it was cool and pleasantly windy. The floor was covered with expensive and very ugly carpets, an absurd modern design of what they called European roses in European vases, with plenty of the pink, revolting to me, which is characteristic of Kerman carpets. We had a lively argument about taste, beginning with that pink and ending with music and poetry. Tea, cucumbers and orange sherbet were there to help us recover from our journey and spoil the lunch.

The magnate had brought ice in the car and would put it into the drinks instead of using it to cool them. The Persians took it happily but I looked on enviously and refused.

Then lunch, with a table, chairs, plates, knives, forks, table-napkins and whisky out of a little flask! That was the European side, but the Persian was a delicious soup with green grapes, giving it acidity and kick; young chickens roasted with abundant and excellent saffron, not the vile stuff they give you in hotels; fluffy rice with more chicken, stuffed marrows, fried potatoes and, dream of dreams, a *chorresh*, made of a mixture of pieces of lamb, mysterious flavourings and whole dried apricots. We ended with bruised apricots, sour cherries and weird little green apples, which all looked very pretty. Persians will shake the fruit off the trees and never have the patience to wait until the fruit is ripe. There were flies, of course, but they didn't trouble us, as during the meal two good-looking boys with beautiful brown eyes fanned continuously.

After lunch I slept in a room with a huge wooden bed in each corner, long, round, hard bolsters, each covered with gay satin brocade and a frilled white cover which looked like an old-fashioned bonnet. That marvellous host hovered over me as if I had been a bird of paradise, and covered me with a piece of pink muslin to keep away the flies. But it was so hot that I threw it away and awoke periodically to whack, quite unsuccessfully, those persistent insects.

The men settled down in the dining-room, the Parsee on the floor and the magnate, looking most undignified and uncomfortable, on two chairs.

After sleep came the visit to the factories, long lines of rooms where for six hours a day men, women and children knotted bits of wool round cotton threads to make carpets. The women wore a light muslin garment over their heads which did not cover their faces, but many of the men only had trousers. In one room a woman had that cheerful little velvet hammock which is the local cot and which was moved so quickly that it would make any European baby seasick. The baby was only ten days old, so grandmother was there to take care of it and the rest of the children.

On a step outside a mother held a child with smallpox. They all felt Europe had failed them rather badly, for that particular child had an enlightened parent who had insisted on vaccination. Nearby a group of boys were having a lovely time acquiring smallpox by putting circles of bright red cherry juice on their legs.

As soon as I entered the factory the workers, who were behind the threads, pulled them apart, had a look, then retired, but they felt safe, as every room had a big talisman, the *Esfand*, to keep away the evil eye, but one set of workers, headed by a man who looked as if he had just come from Montmartre, took extra precautions by burning frankincense over charcoal. It was so delicious that I was glad to be dangerous.

Outside in the street I was greeted by a crowd of women who hoped I was a doctor and insisted on pulling up their eyelids, opening mouths and unpinning their dresses. There was a semi-skilled doctor in the village who had a small income from the government and had to make up his income by private patients, but he sold the drugs he should have given away and was of little use to anyone. As they closed round me I almost forgot what they might be passing on, in my realization of utter helplessness before so much illness. All the ill had been brought out, for they decided that even a touch might do good. It was impossible to

move, difficult to breathe, the smell was awful. At last a Persian rescued me and we started for our long ride across the hot sand back to civilization.

Again at evening the desert was beautiful and friendly; the mountains too were beautiful, but great and impressive, those on the west purple and velvety, those on the east glowing like fire. The isolated desert plants lighted up by the low sun stood like little lamps against their constantly elongating shadows.

As night descended the mountains became ethereal until they too faded away and all that was visible was the bright stars.

There was silence until a jackal barked, seeking its prey. I remembered the blood of the sacrificed goats.

There was no peace, even in the desert.

· 3 ·

THE SHRINE OF SHAH NA'MATULLAH AT MAHUN

IT was an awful journey to Mahun, for time after time the car had broken down and as the unbearable heat increased the water boiled and boiled again. The self-starter refused to work and the mechanic looked as if he would die of heart-failure, as time after time he turned the iron crank handle, which was too hot to hold in his naked hands.

Each hollow was something to dread, for they contained pockets of unbelievably dry and burning air, and in those dips the motor-car frequently stuck. But a little way ahead, for a mile across the desert, stretched a single line of trees, willows with twisted trunks and narrow graceful leaves. Here there was desert, there a little stream, gay and clear, bordered by a line of gloriously, unbelievably-green trees, real, not a mirage, and just beyond again the desert, stretching indefinitely away to the blue mountains, mountains that were desert too. The trees made the desert momentarily bearable, but a sand-storm was upon us—no trees, no mountains, no desert, just misery.

We hid behind our coats waiting until it passed. It seemed a lifetime, it had been just twenty-two minutes. Our eyes smarted, and our noses; we coughed, we could hardly breathe. The world looked just as before, although the bright leaves were dimmed by a thin covering of dust, but the line of stones that showed the side of the road had dis-

appeared. The storm had left a mark—a few storms and that road would be buried and man would make another.

On the car moved, and out of the desert, faded into dullness by a noonday sun, shone the lovely blue dome of the shrine, standing up among the green trees, so bright and clean that hope deadened present misery.

A terrible cloud-burst, a year before, had washed away houses, killed men and made much of the way impassable for cars. It was a cruel irony that where water was needed so badly it should come to destroy instead of create, come suddenly, go suddenly, instead of lingering to give life to plants and men.

The position of the shrine, far away from dirty cities, is very attractive; its architecture is fine and delicate, the details of the gatchwork, of the doors, are dainty and exquisite; its series of courtyards, brightened by pools, are cool and clean; the gardens are all tidy, lit up in July by the glorious flame-like flowers of the pomegranates, and nowhere is there excessive ornament or any hint of vulgarity or tawdriness. It is the most beautiful shrine in Persia.

Shah Na'matullah lies in his simple tomb covered with a deep blue pall, in the great hall built by the famous Shah Abbas, where the light, reflected from the white wall and the simple octagonal turquoise tiles, has an amazing quietness and aliveness. The second hall was built by a governor of Kerman only a hundred years ago but there is no feeling that the shrine was built in bits for it has the effect of an organic whole. In that calm, large space it was easy to realize that the saint and mystic had written, 'The living and eternal hath vouchsafed to this servant ninety-and-seven years of pleasant life'.

He had been born at Aleppo, lived as a youth in Iraq, visited Mecca and so on to Samarkand, the golden centre of the East, but there he had attracted so much attention and admiration that Tamerlane made it financially worth while for him to go to Persia, where Na'matullah lived for a time at Yezd, later at Kerman and finally started his Sufi dervish order at Mahun. He lived a full life, what he called a pleasant life, with women, with children, enjoying the luxuries of the famous court, steeping himself in the beauty of colour and line, for ascetism was not part of his creed, and he found time to write five hundred Sufi tracts and a *diwan* of verses.

Today about thirty recluses live at the shrine and several hundreds, members who belong to the order, move about the country. A dervish had just arrived, after spending one whole year in travelling from

western Persia, and there was considerable excitement because the last recruit was a member of the great Bakhtiari tribe, a man of thirty-six, who was a near relation of the present Minister of War.

‘Why should a man in such a position become a dervish?’

‘In the world there is no freedom, for a man is a slave to one thing or another all day long; here there is perfect freedom. In the world there is no peace; here there is perfect peace. In the world there is no real honesty; here there is God’s own honesty.’

Many men undoubtedly turn to a dervish’s life, temporarily or permanently, when fate has treated them too badly. One of these visited me in Ispahan. He had been a rich merchant, growing richer every day, striving for possessions and nothing else. But cholera came, taking his wife one day and his three children the next. He gave all his possessions to a religious school and retired to Mahun—but one day when walking in the village he fell in love with a pair of lovely eyes. He married the woman, they have three children, but he no longer seeks for riches; they live near the shrine, cultivate a little piece of land and are content—‘Now I am free and also rich, for I have my wife, who is also a Sufi, and my children. As long as the water comes from the mountains we can live. Once a year we visit my cousin in Ispahan, but he is always so worried with his big house, his factories, his telephone, that I go back, knowing I have chosen the better way.’

‘Perhaps I shall become a dervish’, said the cousin.

The dervish looked up, smiled but said nothing. I think he was considering the cost of the finest rice and *arak* and the opium which his cousin loved.

Many people in Persia take an interest in religious ideas, in poetry, in the technique of old literature, which is rare in Europe. Quotations from the classical writers, of both prose and poetry, are still common in conversation; a group of small shopkeepers may linger, quite unduly from the practical point of view, over their tea, in order to admire a view or discuss the ideas and form of an old poet. There was a shoemaker at Shiraz who every noon met his friends at a tea-house by the Tong Gate. They read and recited poetry, they looked at what is perhaps one of the most beautiful views in the world and they often forgot to go back to their work.

‘I have enough bread, tea and sugar, what more do I need?’ said the shoemaker and turned to discuss a minute technical detail of a poem.

One Persian of great ability and wide travel said, ‘When we Persians

cease to quote Firdausi, Persia will come to an end', and yet that man considered himself merely a practical materialist.

The shrine is built in such a way that each of its courts is surrounded by one or two stories of rooms, where pilgrims may bring the few necessities with which they can make a temporary home. It is a religious caravanserai, where people come to pray, to get instruction from the dervishes, to heal their sick minds as well as their sick bodies. At one time the rooms were often full, but now only about a thousand pilgrims come each year.

The first court is surrounded by a frieze of verses from Hafiz and all the buildings have references to the Sufism of the great poet, expressed by Shah Na'matullah in these lines from two of his poems which demonstrate his pantheism, or *wahrdatu'll wujud*:

*We are stricken with grief and drain the dregs;
Dregs and sorrow and cure are one.*

*I called the whole world his dream;
I looked again and lo,
His dream was himself.*

Today, as every day since Na'matullah died in 1431, men old and young sit by the pool reading in old books. Some stay all their lives in the quiet shrine, while others come and go, taking their message of 'God and the world are one' out into the cities, the villages, even into the deserts of their land.

· 4 ·

IN THE DESERT

So camp is over and I'm back in civilization, but it's wonderful how much of civilization can be taken even into the desert. Except for the flies that nearly sucked me white, the two days I wondered where they would bury me, the man with the beard who tickled my toes in the middle of the night, the tarantulas and scorpions whose favourite resorts were the toes of my shoes and under my pillow, and Ali's awful cooking, I'm sorry it is over, but I'm terribly tired with those last nine hours on that donkey.

We went out in a car, it was outrageously expensive and outrageously bad. Of course we started late, but only five hours! when the sun was

so high that the car boiled every ten minutes and one tyre burst. The chauffeur kept himself cool by sucking cucumbers as if they had been cigars and arranging the skins on his forehead and the top of his head. It was impossible not to laugh even when I thought I was dying of the heat. The self-starter soon came to an end and every time we stopped for water the mechanic had to start the car with the handle. Time after time he turned so purple and green that I feared he'd drop dead in the sun.

The road lasted two miles and then we trusted to luck. There were innumerable deep hollows up and down which we switch-backed; in the worst we swung backwards and forwards twenty-one times before we got out! Sometimes we did an outside edge on one pair of wheels, sometimes on the other. It was altogether too much like a rough sea, but finally we tackled the river bed in which the water, ever since the creation, had been busy depositing rocks and stones; fortunately we stuck seriously only when near our destination and fortunately a caravan happened to be passing, so eleven men set to work pulling in front, pushing at the back, and to violent cries of Mahomet and Ali (here Ali quite outclassed his father-in-law Mahomet) the car was finally dislodged.

I was thankful when we came to the stream and the trees where we were to camp, glad to be still, for the going had been so bad that I was nearly seasick. The stream was pleasantly babbling although artificial, and the two principal trees, *chenah*, were some of the finest I ever saw. Their diameter was ten feet, the interior hollow charred, for, being the only sheltered spots in a fiercely windy desert, they had been used as smithies for years.

I looked round for the village. Near was a tiny enclosed piece of land where some very short wheat was growing, with a few white mulberry and almond trees. Now and again ragged men and children drove along a cow, a couple of goats and sheep, but not a house was visible. A mile across the desert were a few trees; perhaps that was the village, so off Assatullah, my interpreter, and I started to reconnoitre. We crossed the innumerable stones and sand that make so much of Persia, and almost fell into a hollow which was a brilliant green field where the local pea was growing. Such a sudden transition from barrenness to productivity is characteristic of Persia. Across more desert, the river-bed, more desert and a woman appeared, standing near the flat, round dome which is the roof of a house in southern Persia. Here was the village, which now consisted of one house, for the others, on account of changes in the water supply, had been deserted and were falling into ruin.

Within a short time after our arrival the servant and interpreter had put up my tent under one tree and arranged their kitchen and sleeping quarters under the other. With two men to wait on me it would be absurd to pretend that I had to endure serious hardships but it was thinning. Of course, illness would have been awkward with the nearest doctor so far away and it certainly would have been unpleasant if the robbers had taken all our food. The gentleman who meant to drag me out of bed, but missed his mark and tickled my feet instead, was something quite non-friendly, but I'm convinced he ran away because so startled when I said —, which is much too unpleasant and scandalous a curse for a nice woman to use, so he must have thought there was a man in the tent.

Ali the servant was not efficient but he was handsome, good-tempered and entirely submissive when I put on a voice and expression that denoted that I was a lady above all ladies, the boiled-down British Empire and a bit more, and he shaved when ordered. I think it must have been for his own glory that he told the whole district, the villagers in the mountains within a radius of twenty miles, that I was a Sayid, a descendant of Mahomet who had strayed to England. That and the fact that my interpreter *was* a Sayid, really descended from that tiresome but powerful creature Hussein, Mahomet's grandson, opened every village to us and made much possible that would otherwise have been forbidden.

The interpreter was a charming boy of eighteen who spoke English very nicely, except when he was tired. He was eager about new ideas, keen to learn. Like most Persians, he had gracious, gentle manners and before our time was up I was really fond of him. Every day the Sayid and I walked about fifteen miles, out in different directions, to see the life of the small, remote mountain villages. We started at 4.30 when the air was really cool, before the sun was up, often taking a donkey to carry our daily kit, a rug for each of us, a thin mattress and a pillow for me, a samovar, bread, boiled eggs, sugar, tea and one *koozah* of boiled water. The donkey was supposed to give me lifts, but as the way was all very much up and down, the load was generally sufficient for the beast. We'd settle down in a village, watch life, talk to those who were courageous enough to come near a foreigner, sleep in the shadow of a tree, if possible near a few drops of water, provided it was not alive with mosquitoes, and start home about 5 p.m. I saw lovely dawns, glorious sunsets and learned a little of the life of most of the people in the district. Perhaps I learned more than a little. It certainly would have



The peasant, the interpreter and the donkey in the Persian mountains.



The copper-smith's workshop in a Persian bazaar.

been better if I had had a woman-interpreter as well, but perhaps not much, for there are few reticences in these tiny groups of two hundred to three hundred people who get a living in the few narrow watered clefts of the mountains.

Through the Sayid they did ask me at what age I had reached puberty, whether I could still have children, but it was not until he was out of sight that they pulled up their dresses to show their stomachs and breasts and were terribly disappointed because I wouldn't play tit for tat! Those eighteen women were a very unpleasant sight. The annual (or less) baby, the vast quantities of liquid food and the malarially-produced spleens made them very bloated and flabby. For a treat I did let my friend Soreh assist me at my bath, but unfortunately I knew enough Persian to hear her describe my points whenever two or three were gathered together. The women were always covering up my arms, even taking the veils off their own heads and risking the heat of the sun, that they might remain as 'white as newly combed wool', that being Soreh's description of my beauty. I thought at first that admiration for white skin had some relation to Europeans as the dominant race, but I saw later that it was much more fundamental.

Sometimes I felt their lives one long tragedy and then they'd smile or laugh—is any race in the world as gay as the Persians?—and tragedy would dissolve into comedy or farce.

We spent one day under an enormous mulberry tree interviewing the villagers. With their charming hospitality they first brought a goat-skin full of good water and then offered to gather fruit. The children were purple, bodies and clothes, from the mulberries, but one gay maiden, seeing my amusement, decided to outdo Cæsar and returned with arms purple to the shoulder. They all watched my face. Laughter made us friends. That little purple maiden followed me about all day and as I was looking at the sacred tree, which stood in the cemetery, she came up and, laughing, made a mark on my arm with a mulberry. I finished tying a piece of my red veil on to the tree just as if I had been a peasant, then turned and pretended to spank her. The village, all standing round watching their strange guest, burst into hilarious laughter and suddenly, in spite of the local belief that foreigners were not only undesirable but might bring bad luck, crowded round and, with the permission of the head of the village, asked me to stay the night. Many of them finally went with me for an hour along those awful tracks that led back to that tent which was civilization and home, in spite of scorpions and tarantulas. The wind that evening was so strong

that we could climb up the sides of the precipitous hills for only a few minutes at a time. Periodically we had to lie down to prevent being blown down the slopes. Our noses bled, we could not hear ourselves speak. Sometimes the donkey refused to move. We had only a small flask of water and that Soreh would not drink because it might be religiously unclean.

I had an exciting time teaching the Sayid, Ali and our frequent guests to keep camp tidy. The Sayid became a very good second in command and superintended efficiently the burial of broken cups, cucumber skins and egg shells.

All the villagers were poor—how poor I realized when I saw women mending, hour after hour, garments that the poorest in England would not have thought good enough for floor cloths. Most of the year they were underfed, living only on bread, mast and *dugh*. In the summer there were fruit sometimes and a few green vegetables, but the milk tasted so strongly of the mountain herbs the goats ate that drinking milk or its derivatives must have been as good as having vegetable soup.

At harvest time, in some villages for about fifteen days, they, quite literally, had a blow-out. Oh, you could hear them, and how they laughed at the noises they made, equally delightful to them from whichever end they came. Every remote mountain village grew some wheat which had primarily a sacrificial value; each family used it to have a feast to which all the world was invited. A goat or a sheep was sacrificed, partly roasted at an open fire and then bits of it put into a paste made of the roughly-ground wheat and water. The rest of the year the people lived chiefly on barley, bought in the nearest town in exchange for wood, mountain plants and gum tragacanth which they laboriously gathered and more laboriously took for twenty-five miles across the desert. If they had used the wheat for flour, it would have made them bread for many weeks, but they were convinced that the feasts were necessary to keep away illness.

'But you have illness and you have death now', I said.

'Yes, that is true, but without the feasts everyone would die.'

There is a strong religious side to these feasts. The food is arranged in an open space in which sits the mullah, who recites sermons about the sorrows of the murdered Hussein while the people beat their legs and breasts, groaning and weeping. But all the sorrow is forgotten and laughter begins when they start on the stew.

The peasants all agreed that the wheat would have made bread for

months, but were sure the feasts would never cease. They cheerfully endured a shortage in the winter because they had made peace with their gods, Mahomet, his son-in-law Ali, his grandson Hussein, and the twelve Imams.

We had a great many visitors at the camp and the women from the villages would come to take me away to see any incident in their lives which they imagined would amuse me. They greatly enjoyed being so interesting to a guaranteed white woman. One day they took me to the milking.

An enormous flock of black and white goats wandered over the mountains, sometimes a mile from their village, sometimes ten, eating, in an industrious and hopeful manner, bits from a plant here, a plant there. Life was not luxurious but it was leisurely. And with them went their sunburnt shepherd, piping most dolorously and unmusically to comfort himself, because of his hopeless love for the lovely daughter of Soreh, who demanded a big dowry and who, wanting to make the girl superior, taught her, unlike the hill-women, to cover her face, but not so well that the shepherd had not seen her splendid eyes and her kind smile.

'I shall never have enough money for her, perhaps never enough for any kind of wife', he said sadly one day when the Sayid and I had wandered over the hills with him, trying to find an eagle that had been killed in a fight with another over a lamb.

Every morning he drove the flock to an appointed place where he met the milk-maids from Delayeh, a little village almost lost in its deep narrow hollow in the hills. Everyone in that village was poor and dirty and many of them were ill, but they accepted those things as the will of God, all except one young woman who was a rebel. She had even refused to go outside one night to get straw for the donkey because she was afraid of snakes, so her husband chastised her in the accepted local fashion by hitting her on the breasts. The sleepless night that followed from the wound had perhaps given her extra courage, for when the Sayid had tried to explain that the Koran had taught cleanliness and without it they could not be healthy she had said, her eyes a little frightened and the colour coming to her face, 'If God loved us He would not make us live in the mountains'. I was busy washing the babies' eyes and ears while the Sayid continued his lesson in hygiene. 'If God tells us in the Koran to be clean, why doesn't He give us more water?' Again she spoke sullenly and insistently, for they had limited

the excellent Moslem laws on cleanliness to the minimum of washing their feet once a day and, judging by the condition of their legs, feet had very strict limits. Because life was often hopeless and always difficult, everything in life had been reduced to the minimum, except births and the infantile death-rate.

Every woman in that village had wounds on her breasts. The men were intelligent and hit where it hurt most. How angry I used to feel when later, in Tehran, Persians told me that beating of women had stopped in Persia. They didn't know Persia, they disliked the cruelty just as much as I did, but they couldn't understand that the world was not going to despise the whole of their culture because the primitive still existed in remote, inaccessible places. Neither, apparently, could they understand that objectionable habits cannot be wiped out by merely refusing to acknowledge their existence.

Each morning certain of the women left the village carrying copper pans for milking, on their heads and in their hands. It was a long way up and down the narrow steep tracks, but they swung along gracefully in their ragged skirts, coats and turban-like head-dresses, their bare feet clinging to the earth.

The shepherds drove all the milking animals inside the rough stone wall that made the corral, and one by one they were driven out through the narrow opening. The women squatted in a double line at the entrance, seizing by their legs, as they came by, those belonging to their own family or the family for which they were milking. None of the goats gave much milk and if they were restive some of the women did not bother to milk them dry. How they knew their own goats was a miracle, but in all the ordinary details of life those peasants were first-rate observers with wonderful memories. A visit of a few minutes to my tent, a slight glance at a new frock and they knew every detail. If when visiting me a few days later anything was missing or had been moved they wanted to know all about it. They even noticed by the way a dress fell when I was wearing a different corset.

The milking over, the women gathered, if possible, under a tree, while the head woman measured the milk of each woman in a small copper bowl which was simply engraved. When the bowl was not full she put in her thumb or first finger and the contents were put down in her memory as the depth of one thumb or one or two first-finger joints.

Everybody's milk then went together into the goat-skins for its journey homewards, there to be redivided under the supervision of the head woman. She was bright and alive, her eyes always dancing

humorously; she was intelligent enough to realize that her baby was better with clean eyes than with eyes covered with flies and industrious enough to be willing to remove the thick layer of encrusted mud which covered its scalp. That woman too had a bad breast-wound, which was healing when I saw it. She accepted cruelty as part of life and laughed whenever she could. She was splendid.

After the milking came lunch, a pretty penurious affair, as it consisted only of hard bread dipped into water and sometimes, for a treat, into a little mast. The rate they ate accounted for a good deal of the indigestion of which they complained, for their teeth were bad.

Of course, there was gossip, especially great excitement over the question as to whether one of the girls should marry her step-brother. They all agreed that he was certainly not a blood relation but such a marriage would keep the few possessions in the family, simplify the question of a dowry, permit the girl to remain in her home, avoid the nuisance of having a strange woman coming into the family, for generally when a son marries he brings the bride under the paternal roof.

But the girl was insistent.

'I don't think it's decent; we have grown up together since we were children. I feel he is really my brother. I would rather never marry.'

The women held their breath, for this was first-class rebellion. The girl began to cry. 'I won't, I won't', she said.

'Let us dance', said the head woman, and two of the girls stood up in the middle of the circle. Their bare feet and mobile toes moved here and there over the hot sand and small stones, and by an imperceptible movement of the hips they made their full skirts billow, sway, undulate, until it seemed that the skirts, not the women, were dancing. Soon they began to move their hands and arms, a little more, and yet more. The seated women made castanet-like sounds by snapping their fingers over their thumbs and at times slapped their thighs. Now and again the shepherd played a few discordant notes on his pipe. The light, the heat, the movements, the sounds were exciting, conquering, and yet a few yards away on every side was desert, just the dust-coloured desert.

Suddenly the dancers stopped, red, hot, wet, sank down on the ground, and there was silence.

'Now', said one of the women to the shepherd, 'wouldn't you rather have a girl who danced like that than your Loved One?' He shook his head, he had apparently been quite unmoved.

'She can sew like a lady from the town', he said with awesome devotion. It was true: the girl had learnt to embroider the pansies and the violets of the Victorian age which were so popular and so refined.

'Marry me', laughed another. 'I can bake bread.'

'Or me', said a girl with pretty eyes. 'My hair curls', and she started to push back her head-dress.

'Shame', said the head woman. 'You must behave.'

The shepherd looked from one to the other a little bewildered, then took a cucumber out of his bag and ate it in immense mouthfuls, pushing away the rough curly hair which fell about his face, but unexpectedly he gave a real lover's sigh, called his rough dogs and went off with his goats to the mountains, where, if there wasn't the girl he wanted, there was at least peace and the companionship of his flute.

A woman laughed as he walked away. 'He will never be rich enough to have a wife but when he goes to the city he will find a girl, for his eyes are beautiful.'

The work was over, the fun was finished, so they started for the long trek home, carrying the full goat-skins on their backs and the empty pans, which they had washed just outside my tent, on their heads and in their hands.

As I watched them go out into the glaring light I thought what a contrast they were to the city-women, who, covered in their long cumbersome veils, living in their special apartments, saw little of life, knew little of men and could only move a short distance with their imprisoned limbs. The real slaves were in the city but on the mountains there was comparative freedom.

The Sayid and I spent many mornings attending to the babies, and later in the day the peasants would come with their sores and I said I'd dress them if they'd come clean. Most of them never returned, I supposed, because they were lazy, but I learned, the day before I broke camp, that they refused to wash, as at birth and death was enough they said. I felt ashamed of my stupidity but doubted if any antiseptic that did not kill would have done any good to those dirt-encrusted bodies that were seething with lice.

For our neighbours we had Fatima, her husband, the half-mullah, and their five children, who lived in the hill on the other side of the stream, in caves dug not from rocks but out of dry, stony earth, whose roofs stood up just because they didn't fall down. Next door the caves had been supported by arches made of sun-dried bricks, nice architec-

tural work and safe, until a cloud-burst had destroyed them. What was left was used by Fatima as a bake-house, where three times a week a bakeress and her daughter cooked the mullah's bread, coming six miles across the hills with empty hands and going back carrying flat loaves as payment.

I thought Fatima a very untidy woman until I spent a day with her, and then I realized that she *was* tidy, considering the circumstances.

The day usually began at four, but on baking-day Fatima was up at two, to walk several miles across the sandy desert and along the stony river-bed carrying wheat, barley or a mixture to be ground into flour, wholesome but coarse and not very clean. As soon as it was ground, in the dark subterranean mill run by water, she put it on her back, minus what she gave to the miller for grinding and plus the bits of millstone, and was back home soon after seven, a couple of hours after the family was up and doing. Everyone snatched breakfast, which was usually mast, *dugh* and lots of bread. Tea was a treat for the family because it was undrinkable without sugar and a pound of sugar cost three days' work, so it was only for the rich.

One morning Fatima was late in returning, the fault of the miller, she said, but just to keep a high standard of discipline the mullah beat her badly. I was really excited and delighted when she retaliated by refusing to make mast for breakfast, so I took her lumps of sugar which I put into her mouth myself lest the mullah should eat it.

The first person to appear after Fatima each morning was the youngest son, five perhaps, a jolly, bright creature with a fresh, unspoiled sinile, who went a ten-minute walk to the fields, where the corn had just been cut, to get a great bundle of straw—'No wheat, mind you, son'—for the cow, the donkey, eleven sheep, three goats and a calf who lived in a corner of the yard outside the cave, separated by branches of prickly barberries and still more prickly camel-thorn. It wasn't a very good fence, so periodically someone had to run out to drive a wandering beast home. I often used to think of the tiny boys who worked in the bazaars, whose faces were so white and grave, and the saying of a man who loved children and beasts—'Nobody works in Persia except donkeys and children under ten'. That wasn't true but it had a grain of truth in it.

Next came the son of fourteen, a horrid creature with a skin-disease and a leer, who was rapidly developing the lazy habits of his father, but when one starts working at five years perhaps it is natural to be tired at fourteen. He at once began to mend the plough, which consisted of

two pieces of wood, one pointed, with a three-inch piece of iron fixed at the end and plenty of goats'-hair rope. When it was finished, and he stopped a great many times to hit the small brother who carried the straw, he took it to a tiny field where he hitched it to the cow and the donkey and the mullah began to plough the land from which the corn had just been cut.

The plough went only four inches deep, actually enough in such a dry land, but there was no manure. Ahead of the plough walked the small son, picking up every weed to be made into hay, and by his side was the daughter of six, who gleaned the straw. Life was so hard that not a stalk could be wasted. After the plough followed the son with the heavy and awkward local spade, with which he prepared new ditches into which water would flow and mounds on which water melons would grow.

As soon as Fatima returned from the mill she brought out all the shabby rugs on which the family had been sleeping, gave them a Persian shake and spread them in the sun. As a special treat the baby goat slept with the family, but Fatima did not disturb the heap of leaves on which it was feeding. She found a broom, merely a few date-palm leaves tied together, but rather precious, as it was brought more than a hundred miles across the mountains, and swept up the hard earth in the front of the cave-rooms, which was scattered with leaves, straw, bits of wool from the mattresses and animal droppings. She collected the sweepings on a piece of sacking and threw them over the wall, just at the last moment rescuing a very nice hand-made hammer which was charmingly decorated.

'The house is now tidy', she said.

She then spread an old rug on the ground, on top of that a small rug containing a piece of uncooked dough which was to be today's yeast. The elder daughter took a big copper bowl to the stream for water, heated it over a shallow hole in the ground, making the maximum use of every inch of dried wood and stalks. Fatima sieved all the flour and daintily, with the tips of her fingers, picked out goats' hair and undesired bits. She looked so coarse with her large features, her misshapen feet and her body covered with the black garment that was brownish and ragged at the edge, a white dress that was grey and black trousers which were patched and frayed, but her hands, like those of many Persians, were delicate and sensitive. Fatima hammered the hard lump of salt which the animals had been licking until she had some fine powder, mixed the old dough with warm water, carefully

removing any lumps and, having put it to rise in another copper bowl, went down to the field and made holes with a stick, into which the small daughter dropped wetted water-melon seeds. According to their faith it was necessary for successful germination that the seeds should be planted by a guaranteed virgin.

The elder daughter brought back the milk in a goat-skin from the distant herd in the middle of the morning and at once made it into mast, then fell asleep in the cave which was a store-house, as it was cool even in the middle of the hottest day.

At intervals Fatima had a look at the bread and finally started the circular oven, ready for the bakeress, who arrived with a copper bowl on her head and one in her hand, thus returning those she had borrowed two days before.

Fatima told me the story of the fort which was up the valley. Centuries ago southern Persia was constantly invaded by the Afghans. On one occasion when they came to Gineguary, a village about twelve miles away, the people hid their daughters in the deep wells. The marauders searched everywhere for the girls, but when some of them came near the well-heads, the girls, thinking they heard their own people, called up to be released. The robbers then seized the girls, took them to a steep hill, Godora Sirch, threatening to throw them down if they did not submit quietly. In the meantime, Ali Gheos, a young man of great strength and beauty, was so infuriated when he heard of the rapes that he picked up a great stick and, all alone, went forth to the rescue. He met the Afghans at the bottom of the Godora Sirch, and whilst most of the foreigners ran away, carrying their captives on their backs, he injured a few so badly that he was able to rescue nine of the girls.

When he returned in triumph to the village he was influential enough to insist that the chief, Hadji Ali Khan, should build this fortress to protect the people for the future.

At noon the family gathered outside the cave for mast and bread only, for the cheese and butter they made were carried by the mullah to the nearest village, twenty miles away. Meat was a rare treat. The small daughter went to the stream for water for tea. Each person was allowed a tiny lump of sugar, which they held between their teeth as they sucked up the precious liquid, which was thus sweetened a little. Then came sleep, each covered with something to keep away the flies, which not only tormented but bit fiercely.

The second daughter had fever, a temperature of 104 degrees until

she bit the thermometer in two. There was no doctor, no medicine, so she just endured, a pitiable sight as she sat huddled up on the sand, her eyes bloodshot, her hands trembling. I dosed her as well as I could and put her to sleep in the cave with the chickens and the bags of goats' hair, telling her mother she was not to go out for any more water that day. But Fatima was a little scornful and said, 'She is only a daughter'. No wonder the few old women are so tough, for they are the rare successful survivors of years of hard treatment and hard work.

Long before the mullah and his sons waked, Fatima, the daughters and small son were busy. There was more straw to be brought for the animals, the calf had strayed, the milk pans had to be washed, the new wheat spread in the sun to dry. One daughter was mending, in her own way, her ragged head-dress, the local peas had to be separated from earth and stones. For this job the mullah and Fatima settled down near the stream with a rug, a sieve and their well-developed lungs; hour after hour they shook and picked and blew until the peas, which were so important a part of their diet, were fairly clean. Soreh then arrived to accuse Fatima of having stolen some of her peas. There *was* a racket; a thunderstorm is mild compared with the noise those three made, but Fatima didn't give up any of the produce.

It was getting towards supper time, for which there were to be soup of these peas, a little piece of goat's intestine that the flies had not entirely eaten, leaves from the hills which they thought delicious and a flavouring of inferior curry. Fatima put a pot over a few sticks to heat the water. If a watched-pot never boils there ought to be little boiled water in Persia. The wind was in the wrong direction for this particular cooking place, and so strong that not only dust but small stones rained down upon the waiting woman. After one hour and seven minutes that water boiled. Oh, everything takes so long when conditions are primitive! But the country-women who did things were certainly happier than the town-women whose lives were confined to indoor work or the more refined occupations of sweet-eating and embroidery. Fatima put in the peas and other ingredients, fitted the lid well and the pot was buried in the partly-dried droppings of the donkey, which burned so slowly that the soup would be done but not burnt, ready for supper an hour before sundown.

A last look at the cheese draining in cloths under baskets, the mast made ready for the morning and the day's work was nearly over. The son drove the few sheep into the yard, pulled up the wicket gate to keep out the jackals; the daughters put the mats on the floor of the

cave, pushed the baby goats into a corner, and young and old, married and unmarried, lay down to sleep together.

Nobody had seen a watch or read a word all day. Weeks, often months, late, they heard of some happenings in the world, but those did not matter, for the realities were the things they knew.

Living in my tent I might have looked contentedly upon the family, typical of many in Persia, as something outside my life—pleased with their lot, many Persians said, because they knew no better. But when Fatima looked at my boiled fowls, my red frock, my pen and paper, my smooth face, I knew how gladly she would have had many of the things that life had denied her. Fatima thought I could have been her daughter; actually I could have been her mother. Soon she will be worn out and whilst I am still finding life an adventure she will probably be dead, and the mullah will be starting to wear out another woman.

The world of desert and mountains was very beautiful but it was impossible to be quite content.

As Assatullah and I came into camp one evening just at dusk, Ali told us that the tree whose hollow was his kitchen was on fire.

'Very careless of you', I said angrily.

'It was not I.'

'Then did Fessatullah do it when mending his copper milk pans?'

'No, it was kismet.'

I was furious, for it was a splendid chenah with a trunk ten feet in diameter, a spread of sixty-four feet and a high mass of branches and leaves through which even a southern Persian mid-day sun could never penetrate.

'Have you put it out?' Ali looked astonished at the question.

'It is the will of God. I cannot cook there any more, but all is well.'

I was too tired to make any further inquiries, too tired to do more than sit by the samovar drinking tea. I had my bath and was getting into the camp bed when I heard men's voices outside my tent. I listened carefully and recognized Assatullah's laugh. They were not allowed at my side of the camp. Something must certainly have gone wrong. Suddenly there was a roar and the tent seemed on fire. I looked out of the little tent window and saw flames soaring out of the main branches of the tree, each of which was like a Black Country chimney. Putting on my dressing gown, I hurried out to find my men and the peasant lying calmly on the ground looking up at the tree, very much entertained.

'Get up. Collect all our bowls and pans, tell the peasant to bring his sons and a bowl each. We must try to save the tree.'

'It is the will of God', said one.

'Ali has wished it', said another.

'I don't care what Ali wishes. It is my will that the tree shall be saved. It is a beautiful tree, one of the most beautiful in southern Persia; it has been growing long before the Moslem religion came to Persia. I have seen more of Persia than any of you. I know.'

Plenty of water was available, as a little stream flowed only a yard from the base of the tree, whose interior was a fiery furnace. By keeping at those men, the flames little by little subsided, but the moment I stopped ordering they stopped working. I felt like a piston in a cylinder.

'We can't get to the top of the tree, but someone can climb up to that protruding ledge and throw water upwards.'

There was no response.

'Very well, I'll go. It is perfectly safe, as the burnt wood is not falling down this way and the sparks are blowing the other direction. Ali, push me up.'

'I will go myself', said Ali.

'I want to go', said Assatullah.

For two hours we worked, soaking all the bottom of the tree, until the sparks, which periodically fell in masses, merely sizzled and went out. A terrific hot wind was blowing across the desert straight up into the tree. It was a perfectly arranged blast furnace.

'We can do no more. Take down the tent and we'll all sleep on the ground beyond the branches.'

'It is the will of the fairies and we must submit', said the men.

A Persian fault is a too great opinion of themselves and their own country, a fault which they say they share with a great many other peoples, so in the hope of saving the tree I lied. 'You know I have travelled a great deal and I tell you that this is the finest tree in the world', said I, apologizing to the giants of California and Oregon. But the men were pleased and, instead of enjoying the fireworks, poured yet more water on to the burning wood.

It was impossible to sleep, for the flames shot forth for another two hours, the flying sparks making a splendid but sad display. How much I wanted to save the tree that had been living so long, that was so beautiful and wonderful in the cruel desert, under whose shadows animals rested during the breathless day, where hundreds of birds, now noisy and agitated in this night, lived peacefully.

Early in the morning the wind suddenly ceased and slowly the flames subsided.

At dawn the interior of the tree was again on fire and smoke shot out of many holes.

'You must dig away the charred wood, take away the fallen ashes and put on more water.'

'The peasant says he is tired. He has submitted enough to your English will. You have worn him out.'

I looked round and saw that wretched man lying asleep, wrapped in his wife's veil to keep away the flies whilst she had to go about in the hot sun uncovered. How I did regret that modern Persia is now so civilized that kicking as a punishment is no longer permitted.

'Will one of you climb up the tree and we'll pour water down the worst branch?' Assatullah, being young, looked upon me as a romantic female edition of the Boy Scouts, of whom he had read, and so was ready for this adventure; also he had recently, after hearing the sermons of an enlightened mullah, been fired with the idea of putting into practice all that was best in the Koran, from Mahomet's phrase—surely written in an amorous moment—'You must not hit a woman, even with a flower' to 'To get learning travel as far as China'.

We tied goats'-hair rope on to the basin known as the 'Lady's Bath' and worked hard. The flames were gradually becoming less when, with a roar and a bang, down came an enormous piece of burnt wood.

'Get down, Assatullah', I called. 'It's dangerous; we can't do any more. We must break camp; get everything ready to move.'

We settled on a flat place up stream where there was a little shadow, but the ground was so hard that Ali had to make new pegs and so was annoyed with the mullah for not working hard at the tree.

The narrow eyes of the peasant opened—'If the lady moves there must be danger. The fairies liked her, I know, because the robbers who came went away and she cured my sick daughter. If the tree is burnt perhaps the fairies will leave us'—he turned and, almost quickly, went up the hill to his cave and brought down spade, bucket, hammer and worked at the tree until the inside was clean and soaking wet.

'That is very good', I said and smiled at him, but he suddenly looked horrified, hastily grabbed his beads and ran them through his fingers, whilst his lips moved rapidly. I had stupidly forgotten to say 'May God protect you', a certain antidote to the possible effects of approval, but when I quickly repeated the important words he stopped saying his beads and returned to the tree.

I went quietly back to the new camp where tarantulas and scorpions, not a burning tree, made lively days and wakeful nights. When we left, some days later, the tree had ceased to burn and the mullah, having talked the matter over with another half-mullah who lived some distance away, decided that Allah had specially sent me from England to save the tree.

So, in the gracious way characteristic of Persians, he made a parting present of enough cucumbers to feed an army, that we and our donkeys might be refreshed on our journey across the desert.

At the end of a fortnight we had eaten all the available fowls within ten miles, the hens didn't lay eggs fast enough for Ali, so we were reduced to bread, some beans, dried peaches and mast. Ali and the Sayid ate the local cheese, but camp didn't last long enough for it not to give me a pain just to look at it.

Getting the water boiled was the main difficulty, as for three-quarters of every day the wind was a hurricane. The men had no fear of any water as long as it flowed, even if it flowed out of a lavatory, and would bring me water to drink a yard below where Ali was washing the *pot de chambre*. But they finally accepted, with a kind of pride, my explanation that the Persian stomach was strong and virile whilst the English was a poor, puny thing. That pride bore them up under all difficulties of making a fire or keeping the primus alight in that appalling wind, which blew the inkpot and dictionary off the table and knocked over and carried away the camp bed unless I was lying on it.

I was nearly homesick when I watched the wagtails, which I felt convinced were also having an adventure away from England.

But what brought camp to an end were the hurricanes, which made it impossible to leave camp and which hit so hard that sleeping was impossible and waking a torment.

· 5 ·

MY FRIEND SOREH

As I walked across the desert I suddenly saw the mud roof of a hut and, before I realized, had fallen down a bank into a tiny yard where a girl was making a fire. She looked at me intently out of lovely, startled eyes. I smiled and sat down on the ground near her fire and we said words to one another; it could hardly be called talking. A few

minutes later a solid, middle-aged woman, a dark-blue cloth falling loosely over her head, came round the corner. She was healthy-looking, rosy-cheeked, strong and robust, with a capable self-confident expression. She evidently knew what she wanted and did her best to get it. We looked at one another and were friends. I think I nearly loved that peasant woman. Whilst I lived in the tent in that remote desert she gave up her work and spent every possible minute with me, and when she wasn't there I felt a little lost.

Because my interpreter was a Sayid she accepted Ali's word that I was one too and that England had plenty of good Moslems, in spite of all she had heard about that country being cursed with Christianity. I told the Sayid not to let her know that her imaginings were incorrect, as we were all so happy together. But, as she thought my form of religion was not quite orthodox, she would never drink tea from my pot or eat anything in my tent.

Soreh was a woman with precise ideals of conduct. She was willing to do anything for me because she said I had a good *achlog*, that Persian word which denotes a combination of character and manners.

'I like you because you laugh and look straight at us. Thus we may get a knowledge of your mind and soul. You can speak only a little Persian but it has a pleasant sound, but we hope you can speak very well in your language.'

She had met two Englishwomen before, but would have nothing to do with them; the first would not sit down in her house on a carpet, refused tea and said nothing; the second screwed up her eyes and, although she talked, she never smiled. 'Smiling and cheerfulness are always necessary for good manners', said Soreh, and many Persians had the same point of view. Throughout my time in Persia I found that a smile, a laugh, a friendly greeting opened doors and made roads easy going. I repeated Soreh's remark to the kindest Englishman I met and he replied, 'By Jove, she's right'.

Soreh, like many of the peasant women, had a great desire to see me undressed because they were so interested in my white skin. Finally, to satisfy her curiosity, I asked her to help me with my bath. She was speechless with astonishment, made funny little gurgling noises as she touched me here and there and could not understand how maternity had left me with what she called a 'child's body'.

Much as she disliked having daughters, she was doing her best for them. They were certainly not to marry before fourteen or fifteen, for her own experience had taught her the pain and sorrow of early

marriage. 'But it's against the law for a girl to marry till sixteen', I said. Soreh looked at me with calm astonishment. 'That is nothing; we know what is right. Tehran is far away.'

The eldest daughter, although eighteen, was not yet married, because, being beautiful, Soreh expected the husband to pay fifty *tomans* down and give the girl a dowry of the same amount. The husband must also be young, have no other wife and a good character, which appeared to mean that he did not quarrel with his servants, his relations or drink *arak* (spirits). Soreh, whose bright bird-like eyes had a way of looking into the mind of everyone she met, had the suitors to a meal, the better to judge them, for she wanted her daughter to be happy. For two years they had been coming and going but the offer of extra *tomans* would not move that mother.

Just before I left she told her history in her little mud house, the four daughters sitting near, the eldest doing some netting for a head-dress, the boy playing with the cat, my interpreter at my side, the hens wandering in and out, the donkey looking in at the door-less opening and I watching Soreh, whose mobile face was delightful and her command over life superb.

Soreh did not know where she was born but she did know that her father had been a noted hunter who could find a deer or a moufflon when everyone else had failed. There was a history in the family that an Englishman had hunted for weeks, but although many moufflon were sighted he could never get a hit, so finally gave half a year's wages to the hunter to shoot an animal with particularly fine horns.

A man wanted to marry Soreh when she was seven but her father considered that much too young; as, however, he died the next year and the mother became a poor widow, Soreh was married to a very old man when she was nine but she did not have a baby until she was sixteen. The husband died soon after the child was born and Soreh was glad, because she did not like him. She put up her hands in horror as if the memory of those years was still vivid. A few months afterwards the baby died too. Then the father-in-law came to her and said, 'You must marry another of my sons', but she refused because they were all old. But again the father-in-law came: 'If you refuse to marry one of my sons we will tell the police that you killed the baby'.

'I didn't kill the baby', the girl replied. 'And I won't marry your sons. Give me the dowry promised by my husband.' As they only gave her a very little of the money, she went to a neighbouring *imam-zaadeh* (shrine) and prayed God to kill the wicked thieving man. God listened

and the man, his sons and his brother all died. Money was then given to her and she was free.

Soreh immediately married another man but left him at the end of two years as he drank spirits and smoked opium. She had had a son by him whom she loved dearly, but according to the law he had a right to the child as she had left the husband. In order to keep it she paid the man half the money she possessed, fifty *tomans*. But she paid in vain, for the son died.

'After a few months I married this man who is now my husband', said Soreh, looking calmly and happily at the untidy peasant who had come into the room soon after the story began. He had sat in a corner, smoking his pipe, obviously rather tired after having taken the donkey, loaded with cucumbers, almonds and peas, to a village two hours away.

'With the other husbands I was too young to understand, but this time I could choose wisely. We soon had a son, but he was nearly dead when he was born and only suffered for eight days. When the necessary months had passed another son was born to me. He was very handsome, and so strong and well-grown that at a year and a half people thought he must be five or six, but one day he fell from his swinging cradle, got fever and he too died.' Soreh looked tragic, so did the daughters and the husband. They seemed to be feeling this death as much as if it had occurred only a few days before.

'I was crazy to have another baby, but as one did not come I took the child of another woman, cared for it well and made it beautiful clothes. But when it had grown strong the mother said, "You must give me back my baby". I said it was mine, but the child began to cry a great deal so I gave it back, and just then God gave me a baby of my own', and Soreh pointed to her eldest daughter.

The husband asked for tea and Soreh turned to me.

'Will you eat some almonds today?'

'Yes, please; yours are always so delicious.'

The daughter went outside to prepare them, by sprinkling the shells with finely-pounded rock salt and water, then roasting them on a griddle over a wood fire, turning them constantly until cooked and covered with a layer of dried salt.

The small son, who had been sitting in the background listening intently, now got up and brought me his pet kitten, which, for good luck, had a blue button fastened round the neck and on each leg. Soreh and all the family watched this little interlude with approval. 'My son likes you. That is well.' I knew how much that meant, for a son is a son

in Persia; that the four daughters and I were friends was a matter of no importance. When the son and his cat had settled down next to me on the best carpet, Soreh went on with her story.

'When my daughter was born I loved her so much that it was almost a sin. I was afraid of such love and feared she might die like the other children, so I made a vow that every year for seven years I would sacrifice a sheep and give it to the poor and at the beginning of the month I would also make bread for the poor. After this daughter came another son, who died when he was only a few days old, but these three other daughters lived, and at last there is this son who is strong but his stomach is much too large. It is bad to have four daughters and only one son.

'What did *you* sacrifice to get two sons?' Soreh asked me. 'But I think it is time you married them, but especially your daughter. Please send for one of your sons that he may marry one of my daughters. If you stay you can live with us in the house in the village, for in two months, when the harvest is gathered, we can sow the winter wheat and go away.

'Now you see we are very well and happy. Once my husband beat me but I beat him back.' Soreh roared with laughter, bent double with her mirth and all the family laughed too. 'Sometimes we quarrel, when he will not let me go out when I want, and he beats me a little, but not hard. But all would be happier if the mullah Ali did not live near. Once my turkey went into his field and when my husband tried to get it out the mullah beat him with a spade. I went to see what was happening and he beat me too and shouted that he'd beat me until I died, for he said I had sent the turkey on purpose to spoil his wheat.

'We went to the justice and for twelve months we talked of the quarrel, but the mullah paid thirty *tomans* to the chief that he might not be punished. I could not pay the chief because I wanted money for my children.'

As I got up to go the son leant over and stroked my face with the down of an immense thistle.

'All day long he has been getting it ready because he thinks you are a fairy, as your skin is white', explained the second daughter.

Just as I was leaving Soreh brought her daughter to have an injured eye bandaged and I was astonished to find the girl's head alive, for Soreh's family constantly wore fresh clothes, the carpets were well brushed and the house was always tidy. Soreh was not interested in getting rid of the parasites, but I didn't have time to discover the reason.

I disliked saying good-bye to Soreh. She had given me my first faith in Persia. Of course, the comings and goings of conquerors, the corruption of politicians and the chicanery of merchants cannot permanently upset a nation that has many women like Soreh.

• 6 •

IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING PERIS

MOST Persian villagers, especially in the south, believe in fairies (the *peris*) as people who, if properly treated, will help men in this world as much as—if not even more than—God himself; but which, if neglected or treated with a lack of respect, will take their revenge. Many villages have near, or within, their boundaries a sacred tree on which the people hang bits of rag and a special copper object, a *ghandel*, consisting of a sphere with a semi-sphere attached at opposite sides, which is also hung up in the tombs of the Moslem prophets, the Imams. At these sacred trees the fairies meet, and near them the twelve, or perhaps only one or two, Imams have at some time walked. On the whole, the possible positive influence of the fairies for good is immense, fundamental, whilst the Imams, Mahomet and the Koran play the lesser but very useful function of defending man when the fairies are enraged or offended. The tree is often a tamarisk but may be a judas and usually may not be broken without evil results to the breaker.

At Usaf-abad a worker in a *ghannat* came to the surface and, wanting a fire, broke a branch from one of the two local, sacred, tamarisk trees, but no sooner had he gone back into the tunnel than the sides fell in and crushed him. No one regretted his death, for they were sure he had been suitably punished for his audacity. Another man broke a branch from the sacred tree of the town of Reva in order to light a fire, but, suddenly seized with a great pain, cried out that the fairies were pricking him with hot irons. His sufferings were so great that he soon died, but the peasants were satisfied to think that the fairies had acted justly and reliably and that everyone could depend upon the immutability of the eternal laws.

In the village of Defarsey, the old wood may be taken from the sacred tamarisk only in order to make fires over which food is to be cooked for special feasts, or to make food lucky for a sick person, the wood thus serving a religious and not a mundane purpose. The local harvest festival is always held near this sacred tree, where the twelve

Imams once stayed for a time before they became invisible and so able to be in all places at all times. The ground under this tree was thick with *ghandels*, which must on no account be taken away.

A couple of miles from Defarsey is a valley where the fairies live and where they have their own well, which, unlike the sacred trees, has no relation at all with the Moslem religion. It is forty feet deep, about two feet across, but well built up at the sides with stones and kept carefully clean by the local mullah, who one day, when at his job, was nearly blinded by the bright light that came from the golden circles on the heads of the fairy fishes which live in the well. Small candles, of many colours, like our Christmas-tree candles, are burnt on a stone which projects near the top, but more often in a little mud oven at the edge of the well, especially built to protect them from the terrific winds that blow down the valley, for the longer a candle burns the more acceptable it is to the fairies. Goats are sacrificed here and the ground is generally black with dried blood; the animal is then eaten by a group of the villagers, the eyes being sometimes dried as talismans.

When the people were asked what they did to bring good luck, they replied, very solemnly, 'Pray to God', but when asked if they ever tried to get help from the fairies their faces brightened; 'Well, of course', they answered, as though the two methods had entirely different values and as if the appeal to the fairies was more natural and familiar. They then told how the two *chenahs* under which I was camping were especially sacred, as fairies liked water and trees and had no patience with deserts. The peasants believed that if anyone slept out alone in the valley he would see the fairies, but there is always the chance of going mad. The peasants wanted me to sacrifice a goat and sleep out, but unfortunately, while fairies were pleasantly uncertain, beasts were unpleasantly certain and bandits unpleasantly possible.

One night recently, as the mullah was walking up the valley after dark, looking for a strayed ass, he saw a light and, going near, found a large circle of the little people feasting. They all had small lanterns and were singing *la-loo-loo*, making a very pleasant sound. He bowed low to them several times, saying '*Salaam!*' putting his hands over his eyes, upon his heart and wishing them happiness. He turned away without fear and full of content, because he recognized that they were all good Moslems, but how he did not know. For days after he could think of nothing but the beauty of the women. It seemed quite inappropriate that anyone as dirty and dishonest as the mullah should ever have the pleasure of seeing the fairies.

This same mullah, not officially recognized as a mullah under modern reformed conditions, because not well enough educated, had prepared a great fairy feast that the little people might cure his sick daughter. He apparently had little affection for this small girl, who had to work while he slept, but he spent months of his small earnings on the feast. When it was over he walked a short distance across the desert and a rocky river-bed to the village of Hussein-abad, where, said he, 'I saw two fairy women coming towards me, each about twenty inches high. One was covering her face with her *chadar*, so I knew she must be a woman, and the other showed her face, so she must have been a girl. The woman spoke, "Well done! It was a very good feast for us", and, throwing back her *chadar* so that I could see she was beautiful, suddenly disappeared.'

These fairy feasts take place in both villages and towns and are of great importance in cases of illness, a coming journey or any major event. The feast, which is completed in three parts, must take place on a Saturday or Tuesday and be presided over by a girl who has not reached the age of puberty, or a woman who has passed the climacteric and who knows the special fairy prayers as well as some of the Moslem prayers. The mullah had to take a donkey twenty miles to fetch the nearest woman suitably qualified to preside over his feast.

The first feast of the three is the *Buh-Koresch*, meaning the Lovely Smell, when no food is eaten but a gum prepared from pistachio nuts is burned and several lamps are lit. Three days later comes the Great Feast, at which certain foods are compulsory and take some time to prepare—*chimall*, a mixture of dates, oil and soaked bread pressed together; cakes of flour and water fried in sesame oil, cakes of sprouting wheat and dates, halva made of flour, fat, sugar and saffron; liver; *callek*, a kind of soup made from the head and stomach of a sheep filled with rice; chicken, *polou* (rice), a black sheep or hen, seven kinds of sweets, of seeds and of vegetables; small quantities of any obtainable food—and in towns toilet articles are added, including rouge and lip-stick. Last comes a dish of salt. The feast must be left unattended for two or three hours and when the human beings return they should find a tiny finger-print in the salt; the person for whom the feast is prepared must then make a finger-print with the little finger beside the other and taste the salt.

During the feast the professional woman prays, first to the fairies, saying lengthily, 'Please give us everything we want', and finally repeats a few Moslem prayers. Eating is accompanied by musical instru-

ments. Three days after the Great Feast comes the Little Feast, when there are three foods in three bowls, each standing on a plate with a spoon on top and salt by the side. These dishes are called *ash*, and are *kaalk* and bread, pounded grapes, and onions with boiled butter. The fairy feast is easy for the rich but the poor have to save a long time before they can buy the necessary foods.

The feast is always accompanied by the sacrifice, at a suitable place, of a black goat, cock or sheep. In Kerman there is a special little mud hut outside the town, near the Rift of Ali, the Ya Ali Rock and a sacred tree, devoted to this purpose; but most frequently the sacrificial place is near a well or a stream. Amongst the Bakhtiari tribe an animal of any colour may be sacrificed and the feast is just an ordinary meal on a more lavish scale. The flesh of the sacrificed animals should go to the poor, but in the country, where everyone is poor, it becomes the *pièce de résistance* of the meal, to which all the neighbours are invited.

A peasant woman took a couple of rooms in a small town about thirty miles from her village in order to give her fairy feast. When it was over she went to sleep in one room and her daughter, being ill, slept in the other. The daughter woke in the night and was surprised to hear music. She called to her mother, 'Who is playing in your room?'

But the mother replied, 'There is no one here. Go to sleep.' As the music continued the daughter got up to look for herself and to her delight she saw in her mother's room a great many beautiful but small men and women dancing, playing music and singing, 'Ma-a, ma-a, loo, oo-o'. The girl's voice trilled in the Persian manner as she repeated the fairy song, while her younger sisters and the audience trembled with excitement. She turned to me, 'If you look up at the mountains late you can always see the fairy lanterns; if they come towards you it is good, but it is better not to go to them'.

Around the edge of the room was a row of tiny beds, where the fairy children were sleeping but making a noise like mosquitoes, 'Kuch, koo-o, kuch, koo-o'. The girl watched this beautiful sight for a long time but finally the fairies disappeared and she went to her room and slept peacefully. As the girl told this story she smiled brightly, for that night had, so far, been the greatest adventure in her life, but she very much hoped to see the fairies again some day.

A midwife of Birjand said she often saw the fairies as she went out to attend to patients at night and sometimes they were carrying away human babies. 'So when I went to bring my thousandth child into the world I locked the door carefully, for that is the child they are most

likely to take. When all was over and I was sleeping near the mother and the child, I heard a curious knock at the door and went to see what it was, although I ought not to have opened the door until dawn. A woman stood outside and said, "Come with me to my house, for my daughter is going to have a baby". As soon as I got into the road several men came up, blindfolded me and carried me away. But I was not afraid. When we reached the house I found a great many people having a magnificent feast. There was gay music and the whole house was bright with many lamps, lamps even being on the roof, but I never thought of the people being fairies.

'They took me to a room where a beautiful woman, who lay sleeping under a padded woollen cover, was just about to give birth to a child. As soon as the baby was born I saw it was the same child I had brought into the world at the other house, and then I remembered that that was the thousandth child. They gave me a few onions as a present and other men, having blindfolded me, took me away, but they disappeared as we came near my house. I said to myself, "Those onions are of no use", so threw them down into the street rather angrily, but left a piece of onion skin in my pocket.

'When I reached my room I put my hand into my pocket and found a piece of gold, but the onion skin had disappeared. Then I at last realized that the people had been fairies and all the onions would have been gold. I went out quickly into the street, hoping to find what I had thrown away, but they had disappeared. I was afraid the fairies would be angry with me, so that very day I sacrificed a black cock.

'Perhaps I shall not live long enough to bring another thousandth child into the world and so shall not see the fairies again', she said regretfully as she turned to take another whiff from her *kalyon* water-pipe.

A midwife went to the *hammam* with a woman who had just had a baby, and there she saw a frog that she knew was a fairy.

'Lady fairy, if you ever have a baby you had better send for me', said the midwife.

A few days later some men came for her, bandaged her eyes and led her to the home of the fairy frog, who was about to have a child. The people told her that if the child was a boy she would have a great reward, but if it was a girl she would be killed.

And the baby was a girl.

But, before anyone could see, the midwife took some wax and after a little rapid modelling added to the baby girl all that was necessary to

turn her into a boy. The woman then received her reward of a large bunch of onion skins, which became gold.

Onion skins as a source of gold in these stories may be related to the prevalent idea that onions are aphrodisiacs.

This is another *hammam*-story. 'Once when a hunchback was alone in the baths she heard singing and, looking round, saw fairies dancing at a wedding, so she too danced, sang and was so gay that the fairies said she might have anything she wished and at her request took away her hump.

'Some time later she met a friend who was also a hunchback and who was delighted to know how she could be cured. This woman went to the *hammam* very early and, as soon as she saw the fairies, started to sing and dance, but the fairies were deeply annoyed with her, as they were having a funeral. To punish her bad manners they fixed the hump they had taken from the first woman on the shoulder of this stupid and unsympathetic creature.'

About twenty miles from the fairy valley is a mountain, Kur-i-Mehr (Mountain of Love), which is impossible to climb, as the top bends over one side as the fingers bend over the palm of the hand. On this side is a cave, in the cave is a tree and on the tree leaves which, if picked, would make everyone love and follow the possessor, who easily might become a king.

Once a man did climb up the mountain, over the dangerous top and down to the cave, where he picked a leaf.

Immediately a great voice called aloud, 'Do not pick'. But he was not scared and picked another leaf. This time the voice spoke much louder when it said, 'Do not pick'. He wanted another leaf badly, but as he picked the third a voice of such terrible fierceness roared aloud, 'Do not pick', that he fell down and was unconscious for a long time. When at last he woke, he decided it would certainly be better to pick no more leaves, so climbed down the mountain and walked towards home along the fairy valley. Suddenly he became very tired and fell asleep under an immense tree that had recently fallen and been cut to pieces. Having waked in the night, he thought he would look at his precious leaves, but they had disappeared.

Another man went hunting on the Kuh-i-Mehr and there shot a goat. As he was carrying it towards the nearest town he was astonished that everyone he met followed him. He sold the goat in the bazaar, but as he turned away he noticed a very strange and beautiful flower fixed in a rough hollow on the horn. He pulled it out and walked away, but

wherever he went everyone followed him, said they loved him, would do anything he wished and give him anything he wanted. He had so many followers that the king heard about it and sent some men to take away the flower which had never faded and which he knew must have come from the cave on Kuh-i-Mehr. It is known that this flower has passed from one Persian Shah down to the next and so on to the present Shah. 'If the Russians or English could get this flower, then they would rule Persia. Wouldn't you like to try to climb the mountain?' asked the peasant as he finished the story.

Among the Bakhtiari tribe it is believed that the fairies take a liking to a man, a woman or a child and lure them away for some months, during that time teaching them to read, but from left to right, and giving them the power to see into the future, but the price of this is a shortened life. The fairies at times visit the tents at night to spin or weave, but it is only these instructed people who know when they have come. This tribe rarely sees the fairies with a lamp, but they can be heard singing nearly every night.

Another young peasant said, 'A friend and I thought we would go for a few days into the mountains, but we started at sunset, which the fairies do not like, instead of four or five hours later, which is lucky. On leaving our village we had to cross several rivers, some shallow, some deep, and were getting on very nicely until we reached a village about five miles from our destination, where there are plenty of trees, a place very much liked by the fairies. We noticed that the first trees were growing so rapidly that we could not see the tops. I was surprised but supposed they must be the only trees growing so strangely, but when we reached the other trees I found that they too were all going upwards to the sky. I was scared, so decided to get off the donkey and walk.

'There was, however, no advantage in that, for a great many snakes crawled round and round at a great pace. I had a stick, but each time I tried to hit a snake it disappeared. I was so terrified that I got on my donkey, whipped it hard, shut my eyes that I might no longer see the snakes and dashed away. We rode quickly through the village and soon reached another river which was deeper than I had ever seen it before, for when I rode in, the water was nearly up to the stomach of the donkey and my shoes and trousers were wetted. On reaching the middle of the stream I saw, on either bank, two beautiful women carrying lanterns. When I moved, they moved; when I stopped, they stopped. I was very afraid and it was a long time before I could find a

place to climb up the bank and out of the river, but even then all was not well, for the donkey's feet were tied and he could not move. I got off the animal and untied his feet, but no sooner were they free than they became tied again. Two hours this continued, I untying, the feet becoming tied, until at last I read some of the Koran aloud, when the feet ceased to be tied.

'In front of us were the two women, still with their lamps in their hands, but we did manage to climb up a steep hill. I was so tired, the donkey was so tired, that I took off his load, put straw in the bag for him and started to boil water for tea. I dared not look round but kept my eyes fixed on the teapot and the cups. Next I unpacked some barley to give to the donkey, but when I opened the bag to put in the corn it was full of stones instead of straw. I put in the barley and some more straw, turned to make the tea, as the water was boiling, but the tea had become sand and the sugar salt. I looked to see how the donkey was getting on, but he was not eating; I went over to him but again his bag was full of stones instead of barley and straw.

'By then it was the middle of the night, so I reloaded the animal and we hurried towards our destination, but just outside the village were now four women and their lanterns. They were no longer little fairies, but were growing bigger, their heads moving upwards like the tops of the trees. I hastily said some of the Koran and they disappeared. I yelled loudly, fell off my donkey on to the ground and became unconscious.

'The village people found me in the morning and carried me to a house, where I slept for two whole days.

'Never again will I offend the fairies by starting at the wrong time and without making a sacrifice.'

A farmer in southern Persia told this personal incident. 'One night I was in my garden, watering the trees, when I saw a number of people in one corner. They were sitting still, singing and blowing flowers from the trees. As I came nearer I saw that they were beautiful and were eating good food. I supposed they must be thieves, so went near to send them away, but now I saw them sitting by a stream. Before I could do anything, five of them had thrown me into the water. When they dragged me out, they covered my eyes, put wax in my ears, threw small stones at me and laughed gaily, making a great deal of noise.

'I was exceedingly angry, because it was winter, rain was falling and my clothes were wet. At the end of two hours they unbandaged my eyes, took the wax out of my ears, but for some time I was still blind. After some hours of wandering I found my house and there, in the

great rooms, were five lamps and five women. The latter had shoes, dresses and faces exactly alike. I threw balls of thread to them, on which they climbed up the walls. I was so afraid that I hid my face on the ground, where I lay for a month until I was well.

‘Never again will I try to interfere with the fairies.’

Besides the fairies, which are kind if they are treated gently and allowed to go their own way, there are a few definitely evil spirits.

The commonest are the *jinn*, small people, with tails on their feet, who come out at dusk and so may be easily trodden on; hence the traveller sings as he goes, giving them warning. There are a number of stories of them being found in *hammams* and *mordeh-shur-kareh*, the building near the cemetery where the dead are washed. A servant boy who lived down my alley in Ispahan showed me the bruises made by the *jinn* who pinched him at night.

Another evil night spirit is the *eresth*, which presses upon people as they sleep, leaving black marks upon their throats and arms, but if the human being has courage to ask the *eresth*, he may receive good news; a relation of one of my friends asked if any fortune awaited him, when the *eresth* replied, ‘Look in the space behind the door, for there you will find gold’.

The *alls* are little people, ‘about the size of fairies who live in the earth’, only coming in contact with human beings when a baby is born; they then attempt to cut off a piece of the mother’s liver, which is put in a bucket, so that she dies. As they are very sly, the woman cannot be left alone for some days. At birth each man has a fairy self, the *homsault*, which must never be harmed, for the evil at once affects its human counterpart.

These are just a few of the tales which exist among the Persian peasants, not as stories, but as records of real and important events, each teaching a lesson which should be a guide to conduct. The more educated people, who live only in the towns, no longer believe in these primitive nature-faiths, but most of them do not, unfortunately, realize that there is any interest or importance in obtaining records of this rich and living folklore before it has passed away. Some Persians are actually ashamed of these old beliefs and try to hide their existence from foreigners.

Fairies play a smaller part in the minds of the people of Ispahan than of Kerman. Some of them know nothing of fairies, some parents will not allow their children to hear the old tales lest they should be scared or believe such old-fashioned ideas. One woman said with annoyance,

'If fairies had ever been true, Mahomet would certainly have mentioned them. I never heard that your Jesus Christ said they were real either. If you in Europe like to tell your children fairy stories I am very sorry for you ; it shows you are not as educated as Persians. I do not believe that even in the little villages any Persian has such silly ideas. We must get rid of these things.'

'Of course, but do get records of them first', I said.

'Why? That would be to write us down as fools.'

I tried to explain, usually without success. Their eyes were turned to the future, they were running as fast as possible from the past, the past good and the past bad, the past dull and the past interesting. The remains of Persepolis was the only part of the past that was worthy, not because of its beauty or its interest, but because it was an evidence of greatness.

Many Persians cannot look at folklore objectively because fairies and *jinn* have quite recently been a part of their life, especially a part of their fears. Most educated Persians will have to be more cultured before they are able to realize the value of this immense store of the fears and hopes which have so long influenced, and are still influencing, the lives of their people.

Perhaps the immense wave of enthusiasm for education which is sweeping the country will include a study of the old as well as of the new.

· 7 ·

THAT WONDERFUL NIGHT

WE had a journey of nine hours down from the mountains and across the desert. It was the beginning of July and unbearably hot in that southern part of Persia, hence night travel was essential. The moon set at eleven, so if we started at ten we could have its light for the first part of the journey down the dry river-bed, which was covered with stones of all sizes, from pebbles to boulders.

As the donkeys cost only fourpence for three miles, I was extravagant and had nine, instead of the four which were considered adequate, because I thought they'd have such fun going lightly laden, but the two muleteers were horrified—they obviously feared a donkey strike next time they made one donkey do the work of six. I also ordered the animals the day before. What a lovely holiday they had! They strolled about the dry, recently-cut cornfields, sniffing at tasty bits of straw.

They walked over a wall and had a splendid feed of apricot leaves before the muleteers could recover from stomachs gorged with *my* rice in order to beat them back; they rolled in the sand and snuggled their long-eared heads on the hot earth. I learned that donkeys could laugh as well as bray. I insisted on a couple of hours' sleep before we started, but as the luggage was packed and we had to lie on the bare ground, a special precaution was taken against snakes, scorpions and tarantulas by our sleeping on one side of the stream and a lamp being put on the other. The lamp was supposed to attract the beasts; those on the other side wouldn't get to us and those on our side would be in such a hurry to reach the light that they would not bite us on the way, but would plunge enthusiastically into a watery grave. It sounded well planned, but I found it difficult to sleep, as snakes are bad but tarantulas are simply awful.

We started off in the dim light, the cook Ali and the interpreter, the Sayid taking turns to lead my donkey over the rocks, as the reins consisted of one rope. Suddenly my donkey stopped and brayed loudly; it sounded like thunder in the still night, but they all laughed and Ali said, 'Once a man came up from the sea and, hearing a donkey bray, exclaimed, "That is a bad sound", but when he heard men talk he groaned, "That sound is even more ugly and foolish as well. I'm going back to the sea where there is peace."'

'What would he have done if he had heard a woman?'

'Taken her to the sea with him', said one.

'No, fool; he would have run', said another.

For a time we went ahead in silence, the night becoming darker and the stars brighter as the moon sank. Once, as we crossed a little stream, I could smell peppermint and a lovely mountain herb that had both the sweetness of honeysuckle and the stinging fragrance of lavender. When we left the river-bed I was allowed to hold the rope, but I rarely guided the donkey, who was a self-willed egotist. The men always wanted me in the middle of our little caravan with a muleteer close behind, as they feared robbers, but I could not bear the regular pad of that man's feet; it was too like being followed by a ghost. Yet if I succeeded in getting ahead or at the side, there was a terrible to-do.

'You must keep near', said the Sayid. 'Only the other day some robbers watched a man come out of the bank with money, and followed him and his party as they set off across this desert. Soon the robbers attacked, but fortunately one of them was killed and the other was left by the track, dying, it was supposed. But another caravan came along,

picked him up and took him to a missionary hospital. There he said he had been set upon by robbers and all his possessions taken, so various kind people gave him money and off he set on another robbing expedition, but that time he was seized.'

It didn't sound a bit nice, but the night was so beautiful that I could not be afraid of robbers, although I knew the men were constantly on the alert. Each tiny sound made them go slower or faster, and when miles away they saw a faint light, there was much talk; hours later we came upon it, a broken-down lorry surrounded by sleeping people.

In a motor-car the desert is horrible, cruel, brutal, but when riding on an animal it has a large beauty of its own. A car rushes, jumps, leaps, creating dust and noise. It is agitated and does not seem very powerful, for the mountains which came into view at dawn are so often still apparently the same distance away hours later. The desert stares in silence at the car and continues to be desert, infinitely independent of the great apparatus which may break down at any minute. The desert is like an enemy.

But when the dusk falls and the animals go forth with their burdens, the desert is something else; the air may be dry, the soil may be dry, giving nothing to either man or his beasts, but the desert makes man feel great and free. The foot of the camel touches the dust, the dust touches the foot of the camel, the animals pass on but the desert remains. One animal dies but another is born, one generation treads in the same place as another, for thousands and thousands of years. The camel-bell sounds, each clear note telling that a little distance has been conquered, the sky is quiet like the desert, but, like the animals, the stars move on.

'Look, two shooting stars', said the Sayid, and Ali the cook burst into song. It was so surprising ; I only thought he could cook badly.

'A young man and a maiden fell in love with one another, but he had to leave her, and in a battle was wounded. Everywhere she sought him, until at last she found him alone on a high mountain above which shone two stars. She undid his armour, but he had a wound too deep to be healed. Looking at the flowing blood, she said, "We have been like two stars shining with love and happiness, now we will be two fountains flowing with blood", and she stabbed herself and died.' Ali's lovely voice was plaintive; surely he wasn't sobbing! The end of the song seemed to make a hole in the night, in the great dark world where we moved. I saw that Omar Khayyam was right, that the sky really was a bowl and it was close upon us.

Suddenly the leader of the caravan stopped and we fell together in a heap.

'It's a man', said the Sayid. There was a hurried conversation and a figure rose, came near, holding on his back a minute lamb, so thin, so weak.

'The peasant is taking the lamb to the market so that he may buy some medicine for his sick child.'

'Give him some bread and eggs', I said to Ali. 'He looks fearfully thin.'

Ali handed him some bread.

'I said eggs too.'

'The eggs are packed away, *kharnum*. I should have to unload the donkey.'

'I told you to put the food where you could get it easily. Unload the animal.' Ali did what he was told, but he was annoyed, as he had hoped to take all the eggs to his own home.

'Give the man four eggs and everyone else two.'

Soon we were on our way again and the muleteer was saying a poem in a curious singing voice. 'Oh, leader of the caravan, I pray you do not hurry, for my beloved and I have been lingering in the night alone. We have loved in the moonlight and under the stars, but wait now for us, that we may not be lost in the desert and because a caravan without lovers is like a lamp without light.'

I held my breath, for the muleteer looked a mere lump of heaviness. Had he loved too? Did he feel free as he went through the night? How different it was from being a prisoner in a car! I could not reach down to the sand, I could not reach up to the stars, but I felt like a swallow that, in flying, nearly touches the grass or the water of a lake.

We moved on and yet there was no visible evidence that we moved, only the constellations changed their places and more stars shot across the sky. Presently Ali sang again.

'Said a man to a maid, "It is the time of spring and flowers, of songs, of nightingales, the time for lovers, but, my beautiful lady, do not be so cruel as to make more captive a bird already caged, do not throw stones at a glass already broken or wound this heart of mine which is already yours".'

How lovely the man's voice was! I forgave him all the greasy food he had given to me, the fried onions which were still raw, the boiled eggs that were stones.

We passed a tea-house and they wanted to stop, but I was adamant;

there was a faint light in the east, soon the sun would come and we were still far from our destination.

'Give everyone cucumbers', I said to Ali.

After the short pause the donkeys trotted gaily for some distance, their bells accompanied by the noise of cucumber-eating. Presently the muleteer began another story.

'One day a dervish met a king and the latter said, "Tell me why you became a dervish, for you seem more like a prince than a beggar?"

' "Oh, king", began the dervish, "I am the son of a rich merchant of Nishapur, but soon after I was born I began to sing, and sang so sweetly that everyone who heard loved me and would not leave me. One day when I went down the street 4,000 people followed me to my house and so alarmed my mother and father that they put me in a cage, and the cage on the roof. There too I sang and a great bird came every day to listen. One day, as it was going to leave me, I took hold of its leg and off it carried me and the cage, flying so high that, when I looked down, the earth was only like an egg floating in a great ocean.

' "I was afraid and prayed to God, asking Him to let me return to the earth. At once the bird came down and dropped me in a large and beautiful garden. In the centre of the garden was a palace in which was everything a man could desire, carpets, pillows, food, fruit, sweets, but in all the great rooms I could see nobody.

' "Being lonely, I began to sing, whereupon flocks of birds crowded round me and I heard beautiful music. But think how surprised and delighted I was when I saw a fairy come towards me.

' "The Queen wishes to see you", she said.

' "I followed her into a room where there were a great many fairy girls, each apparently more beautiful than the other, but when I saw the Queen sitting on her golden throne I knew she was the most beautiful woman in the world. I loved her so suddenly and so intensely that I could not stand up straight, I could not see, I could not hear.

' "She called me to her side and handed me a glass of wine. Then I was happy indeed and thanked God for having given me such a glorious maiden. All night I sang to her, but at dawn she and all the fairies had disappeared, leaving me sad and alone.

' "At night she returned and again I sang till dawn. Thus was I happy till the seventh night, when the Queen said to me, 'You may marry any of these girls. Choose whichever you think is the best.' 'Nobody is as beautiful as you, it is you alone I wish to marry.' 'That

is impossible', the Queen said proudly. Nevertheless, I tried to kiss her, but she struck my face so hard that I fell down unconscious.

'“When I woke I was outside the garden, and, recognizing that I should for ever remember and regret this great love that I had had and lost, I became a dervish.”'

Listening to the story we had forgotten how quickly the night had passed and were surprised to see the lovely false-dawn in the east. Far away to the west we heard a camel-caravan. I begged the muleteers to make the animals go faster, for I wanted to reach Kerman before the sun was high.

We passed a village that was just waking. An old woman in a dirty pink veil looked out of a door and went back quickly, thinking we might be robbers. A shepherd led his flock of goats and sheep to a pond. Several mangy dogs growled as we passed. The night was nearly over and dawn near, but how quickly it had gone—that wonderful night of space, of quietness, of story and of song.

Slowly the light grew, and suddenly the great sun which was so glorious, but which I feared so much, was casting shadows.

'Hurry, please', I said. 'Hurry.'

I had seen many dawns in Persia, but none was more beautiful than that which ended so perfect a night.

'Sing us one more song, Ali', I said, and in the golden light, with our shadows moving before us, his voice rose again.

'A fair one said to her lover, “Oh, brave one, oh, my man, you have seen many towns in strange lands; tell me, please, which is best”. Tenderly he turned to the woman and said, “That town where my beloved dwelleth”.'

A few minutes later we had passed the old ruins, we had passed the place where the fairies lived and I got off the donkey to find I could not stand.

Then Ali the sweet singer tried to cheat me about our expenses, and the muleteer who knew poems and stories that were poetry tried to cheat too.

How Persian!

But the Sayid and I put up a fight, refusing to be swindled. Ali and the muleteers respected our justifiable pugnacity, so we all shook hands and parted the best of friends.

How Persian, and how delightful!

I gave this chapter to a friend. He returned it, laughing.

'And how many months did it take to collect those stories?'

'They were all told that night. It's an accurate account.'

'Nonsense.'

'No. Truth.'

'Well, *how* Persian and *how* delightful!'

• 8 •

A DESERT JOURNEY

THE Russian woman and I both bought the same seat, next the driver, in the post-lorry which was supposed to go the 410 miles across the desert from Kerman to Ispahan in forty-eight hours. That was bad enough, but she was so big. But we had to squeeze in, there was no choice, as there was no other car for several days. Unfortunately there was apparently no way of dealing with the man who sold the same article twice, for he merely replied that, as far as he could understand, there were two seats.

She said she must sit outside as she might be sick at any moment and every moment, so I was pushed next the chauffeur, had my left leg regularly scratched by the gear and my right by the hand brake. The temperature was awful, the air hot as a furnace. It hurt to breathe. The springs of the seat had long ago been taken out to mend the car.

But if two of us sat on one seat in front, at least five were in each place behind, and they had never, never been washed, ate strong-smelling fats and herbs, had a thousand or more babies that cried continually and a supply of parasites that had a preference for foreign blood. I could almost hear that army marching from the passengers at the back to those in front.

The Russian murmured '*Kasif*' (dirty) time after time, and in the intervals was sick. She was also terribly depressed because she would not see her children for ten days, they being her sole consolation for being a refugee in this barbarous land. But she had a heart of gold and a marvellous shoulder. I fell asleep and my head dropped with a bump on the steering wheel, but she made a cosy place on her well-padded shoulder, and there I would sleep until we had another bump.

There had been a cloud-burst, so the track in the desert had disappeared, and finding a new one was adventurous and lively. As night comes quickly the driver decided to hurry, but hurrying into a crevice is not pleasant and my head crashed into and cracked the wind-screen,

but that was not serious as I was wearing a topee made in the days before brown paper was invented and the noise amused the passengers.

We had no time-schedule except the general one of arriving in two days, or three, so we stopped when the chauffeur was tired, met a friend on the road, was thirsty for tea or wanted a little conversation.

Sometimes the post-bag was ready when we reached one of the small towns, defended by its mud walls and partly ruined towers, and sometimes not. In the latter case, as there is no privacy in Persian life, the postmaster went round asking people likely to have letters to hurry up and get them finished. Literacy is so rare that in these small towns, even more than in the big, the professional letter writer is very important, and not only is he not sworn to secrecy, but the sender often dictates the letter before an audience. One morning we had to wait a very long time because it was known that the local governor had written a letter and no one dared to wake him to get it.

I watched the donkeys coming and going from the village pond and learned that a child of five could really guide them, that a lame beggar can run, and that romance may hide behind rags and purdah, for a veiled girl came out of the town gate, drove a sheep behind a wall, waited, and presently a ragged boy came by, pulled aside her veil and gave her a very good Hollywood kiss. It was the first and last time I saw a man kiss a woman in Persia.

At each stop the passengers went into one of the rooms of the tea-house or garage which has often replaced the old caravanserai, where they lay on a rug on the floor or on a wooden bench, slept and drank tea. Sometimes they also ate eggs, either boiled or, more frequently, slowly baked in charcoal ashes. The mechanic beat everyone by twice eating fourteen eggs at a meal. There were always bread and mast to be bought and at least two beggars waiting to receive alms.

I had a large box of provisions tied to the shady side of the lorry and my bed on top. Each time we stopped the mechanic got down both, and when mosquitoes were too bad the net was put up too. The other people protected themselves from the beasts by covering their whole faces with coats or thick pieces of material. Once the mechanic said it was useless to put up the bed as we were stopping only five minutes.

'Get down the bed, please', I said firmly.

'We're only stopping five minutes, *kharnum*.' How well I knew those five minutes! I forgot all my little Persian and, standing there in the moonlight, high on the steps of the caravanserai, I pointed dramatically to the bed and let fly in English. The mechanic looked aston-

ished, laughed, everyone laughed and a dozen people flew to the bed, which was up in one minute, and in two I was asleep in the brilliant night. By night I always camped outside, but by day hired one of the empty rooms which are kept for travellers.

It was far too hot to travel from ten to five, not only for the passengers, but because the radiator boiled every quarter of an hour, the tyres were apt to burst on the scorching road and there was no shadow in which to do repairs.

Cars are few in the desert, but they are, except upon dangerous roads, more frequent by night than by day. Everyone is ready to help, so that when a break-down occurs in the dark sufficient mechanics and lamps soon appear to put things right. Every car travels with both a chauffeur and a mechanic, but in the less frequented roads the cars go in convoys.

Bread dries like stone in a few hours, and unless water is in a *koozeh*, a porous water bottle, it rapidly becomes unpleasantly hot and yet, on account of the great probability of stoppages, miles from anywhere, it is essential to travel with a supply of food. Some of the smaller towns had fruit, but so badly handled that it was unpleasant for a European to eat and certainly unsafe unless washed in boiling water or permanganate, but boiling water could always be obtained and I carried permanganate.

Here and there in the southern desert are entirely or partly deserted towns and now and again a tiny village. Once, nearly at the top of a pass, we stopped because the radiator was boiling, by a solitary tree and a tiny runnel of water. Everyone sat as near as he could to the small stream, but I made for what looked like a village half a mile away. At last I found a small wooden gate and went through to find myself opposite a mud hut, where a man was mending shoes, helped by a boy with so white a face that he looked as if dying. The cobbler said life was hard, for many people did not even wear shoes, but he managed with his two sheep, three goats and the garden. Wouldn't I visit the garden? He had every kind of fruit. Here at the top of the mountains apricots were still green, though in Kerman they had been over for weeks. I was afraid to accept either the white or black mulberries, as his hands were dirty, but how thankful I was for the apples, for which he would receive no payment. His beautiful unveiled wife came to talk to me, carrying the most filthy baby I have ever seen. One could not put into print the condition of that child. It wore a tiny cap covered with charms, there were charms on its arms, around its neck and its waist,

and the rest of its body was covered with a tiny vest and dirt. The mother had such a refined, intelligent face that it seemed impossible that the child could belong to her. When I returned to the lorry I shared the fruit with the others, but there was one apple short, so I decided the mullah should go without. I loathed the mullahs with their smug faces.

One afternoon we saw a sand-storm coming. The chauffeur went as fast as possible in the hope of escaping it, but finally we had to stop and cover our faces with towels and coats until it passed. Those few minutes were like eternity.

The desert seemed unending, the mountains always waiting the same distance away. The desert was cruel, but often, not so far away, was a mirage, lovely trees floating in the air or the appearance of unending lakes, utterly calm, clear and blue. There is nothing in the world as quiet as the mirage of a lake, it is the one compensation of the desert. But everyone was weary with the heat, the glare, the sand, the wind.

At last the terrible day ended and the wonderful night of the desert, made vivid by a full moon, almost made us forget the day. The car tore through the night, going as fast as it could to beat the distance, to beat the coming day. We were all glad to see the sun go down, and counted with anxiety the few hours which would elapse before it came back to torment us again. How we hated that great round orange fire as it disappeared!

By eleven the chauffeur and mechanic, who had been taking turns, were worn out, almost fell off the car when it stopped and in a few minutes were asleep, one on a wooden bench, the other on a bed made of five chairs. I lay awake for a long time watching the shadows of the buildings moving across the road, saw a flock of sheep creep along under the walls and so to the pond, watched women in white carrying vessels for water, men come out of the houses to sleep on the ground by their doorways. A donkey caravan passed by, their bells noisy, some of the men singing, others moving as if they were unbearably weary. There was no peace on that bright night. We were to wait for an hour, but nobody waked till after four, horrified to realize there were only a couple of hours before dawn.

On we went, stopping for the middle of the day to battle with flies and heat, then on again.

'How many hours more?'

'Four.'

The car chugged on, we looked eagerly for the trees which would tell us that we were near Ispahan, our destination. We moistened our lips with warm tea, put slices of cucumber on our foreheads and arms to cool them a little. Our skin was rough from the dry air, the sand had surely entered deeply into our bodies.

'How many hours more?'

'Two.'

That was not so long to endure. And at last the car rushed past a little group of trees at whose feet water flowed, and across us came a wind that was cool and damp.

A few minutes more and there were trees above us, millions of quivering, fluttering leaves, dancing, joyful and bright. The soft white under sides of the poplar leaves looked clean and gentle. The sound of water in the narrow brook was music. The desert was behind us, we were safe once more.

ON TO THE BAKHTIARI MOUNTAINS

FROM Ispahan I started to visit the Bakhtiari, that tribe which was supposed to have personal beauty allied to all the noblest qualities of unspoiled man, and a home amidst the finest Persian scenery.

At last, after much discussion with the authorities, an Englishman and I started off on 14th July, taking a chauffeur, a mechanic and one servant. There were no hotels ahead of us, but that was quite unimportant, as the Bakhtiari are very hospitable and we knew, if the Ameer could be found, that all would be well.

We started at six, only an hour late, making for the mountains, whilst the air was still cool and all the world lovely. The marvel of waking, morning after morning, to a clear blue sky was a surprise to me, even at the end of five months. The peculiar quality of the Persian atmosphere is due to a rare combination of altitude, heat and dryness. Until eleven it was a splendid journey. We passed villages busy with the golden harvest, and plains, higher in the mountains, where the unripe grain was still standing, making a green world. Later in the day it was hot, oppressive and the roads terrible.

We reached Dec-kurd (or Shahr-kurd), about one, where, being friends of the Ameer, we were received by a handsome man into his hospitable house. He gave us cool drinks, produced an excellent Persian lunch with a *horesh* containing red cherries which would have been perfect if I hadn't dreaded biting a cherry stone.

Our charming host wanted us to stay the night, but for some time we were undecided. There was the natural desire to get into the real mountains and there was the possibility that, the road being villainous, we might get stuck in the dark. He won by his sympathetic manner.

After lunch we rested, I in a dark inner room where I felt a real princess, as my mundane mosquito net was replaced by lovely plum-coloured silk ninon, the pillow slip was splendid purple silk brocade, the mattress was covered with satin. We awoke for tea and went for a

stroll to see the host's garden. What a surprise! It was very large, with long straight walks of tall trees, silver poplars and sanjan, about twelve years old, *but* under the trees grass grew, so that there were long green walks. It was a breathless sight for English people. I sat down, just to have the pleasure of being once more *on* green grass. There was plenty of water in this high valley, so periodically the trees, and the mounds which made the avenues, were flooded two feet deep. Sitting there, surrounded by a forest of young trees, enjoying the moist air, I felt that only poetry was needed for perfection.

'Would you be kind enough to recite a poem?' I asked.

I expected the host to know a couple of poems, but I was surprised when out of his pocket he took a book filled with his favourites, ancient and modern, grave and gay. He sat down, his back against a tree, and intoned in a pleasant but somewhat monotonous voice. A brother and friend were with him, delightfully lacking in self-consciousness in their approval and delight. They joined in the poems which they knew. The recitation was frequently interrupted for a discussion of either the ideas or the technique. He recited poems by Sa'di, Hafiz, a local Ispahan poet and one by a woman, Saiyarah Nikulhast, to her dead lover, in which she ended, 'I am like a lone bird imprisoned in a cage, the cage of desires that can no longer be fulfilled. I can only escape by burning the bars with my fiery spirit.' Too soon the host had stopped, in order that we might visit the town.

Before we started, he took me to visit his *anderoon*, which was a house five minutes away, very shabby and dirty, the courtyard in an unpleasant mess. His wife was plain, dirty and untidy, her hands covered with henna to keep her head healthy. As she came towards me she picked a little white rose, presenting it shyly and graciously before she touched her eyes and shook hands. Her old mother was equally unpleasant. She too gave me a rose, but was not gracious, as she was suspicious of the husband introducing a strange woman. A dreadful hag of a servant brought tea, whilst the wife lighted cigarettes, giving the first to her husband and the second to me; the host explained that that was polite in the *anderoon* but would be rude in his part of the house. He said he was sorry he was married, as children were a nuisance and women were stupid. I did not wonder. It was difficult to believe that such a man could be married to such a woman. But it was a backward district, for in the town, which had 15,000 inhabitants, although there were several schools for boys, there was none for the girls.

We made a solemn procession up the shabby main street, the in-

habitants enjoying us as much as we enjoyed them. As usual, the Singer machine was very modern on one side of the street, whilst on the other a man made a piece of wood spin with a tight string against his agile toe, just as natives still do in Central Africa. The most depressing sight here, as in all Persian bazaars, was the vast quantities of bruised and rotten fruit, largely due to collecting by the quick and lazy method of shaking the trees.

We walked to the cemetery, which was on a slope just outside the town, and there, as often in this district, were a great many lions as monuments. They are curiously modern with their simple cubist lines, but the design is of great antiquity. These lions are placed on the graves of the specially brave, having certain traditional objects carved on each side: on the right a horse, a shield, a pair of pistols in holsters, and on the left an enormous long sword and more pistols. At Ispahan certain fanatics had destroyed these lions in the cemeteries, so the head of the education-department, whose subsidiary function is controller and guardian of antiquities, has collected them and they are now safe near the public buildings and bridges.

The people of Dec-kurd were deeply amused by the egoism of a rich merchant, who was not content with a simple monument, but had erected for his glory a series of rooms and alcoves around a tiny garden which was always to be in charge of a servant. A group of dervishes were making use of one alcove. They all belonged to the order of Shah Na-matullah, whose lovely shrine is at Mahun. Two of them, in full dervish regalia, were dispensing tea, *kalyon* and *hashish* but the others were mundane members of the order, one of them having come back into the world of money and competition after having been head of the shrine for some years. He was smoking opium. He had two pipes a week, one at the beginning of the Moslem Sunday and one at the end. He was a sturdy, fresh-complexioned man, not at all a slave to the habit, who had none of the stigmata of the regular smoker. The others were busy reading the mystic words of the Master and smoking *hashish*. I wondered at what point the exalted mysticism of the poet and teacher turned into the hallucination of *hashish*, but these men, like so many dervishes, had that simple, friendly, happy expression which always made me pause to wonder. The dervishes never had a particle of the anti-foreign feeling which so frequently made me uncomfortable, even acutely unhappy. 'God is immanent in the Persian, the European, this flower, that cloud. Some day all mankind will know and understand', said the ex-chief.

We sat with them for some time as they talked of this oneness with the divine, of how that unity frees man from the limitations involved in material possessions, of the satisfaction of feeling that time and eternity are one.

As we left, the setting sun was turning the land and the mountains into glory. Going back, I had a bet that the Englishman would never find his way, unaided, through the labyrinthine streets. The Persians entered into the game with great zest, even trying false trails, but I had to pay up. Persians do love jokes and laughter. If they are, at bottom, a melancholy people, they do hide it particularly well, for their gaiety always had a bright resiliency which was very attractive.

It was nearly dark when we reached the great house, where we sat down on the verandah, which was very noisy with vast flocks of birds settling down for the night in the garden, and later equally vociferous with frogs. We drank sherbet and *dugh* while the host recited more poetry. Our chairs were placed near candles, protected from draughts and flies by glass shades, but in the shadows sat the servants, to whom the host turned for advice if he forgot a line or wanted a suggestion as to which book contained a particular poem. Here, where the chief work of the servants was to fall over each other, except on the rare occasions when they were doing something, there was this spirit of real democracy, but never a sign of taking liberties. The poem that evening which I remember best was by Nasir Khusrau, who died about 1800. It ran thus:

*No one has a right to kill another;
If you must sharpen the sword, let it not be for murder.
Christ, when walking along a road, saw a wounded man—
He stopped and, putting his finger to his lips,
Kept silence a moment before he spoke.
‘Oh, murdered one, whom didst thou kill
That thou hast been killed?
And who will kill him
Who has killed thee?’*

The host told of the long winters when there was nothing to do but shut out the cold and snow, keep in the little available warmth, read French novels, Persian poetry and play the gramophone *ad nauseam*. He did not mention opium and he certainly did not look as if he spent his winter with that stinking pipe.

Just as I thought that hunger and fatigue would end my Persian

journey, supper appeared. Persian food is very monotonous, and is made more so by everything being served on the table simultaneously, but that night there was hunger enough to make almost anything exciting.

We, our host and the servants went to sleep on various parts of the great verandah. The host, to be polite, stayed with us instead of going to his own house. He slept on a heap of four mattresses under a magnificent purple-satin *lahof*. We had our own camp beds and mosquito nets, which were indeed much needed, for there were innumerable insects. The servants camped on a thin mattress and a pillow, their toilet consisting in removing their shoes and loosening their braces, but the chauffeur and mechanic also took off their ties and collars.

Breakfast was a funny meal, with tea and bread anywhere you happened to sit down, and eggs whose yolks fell out of the shells and made a mess.

About seven we were away, parting with regret from that very delightful host.

The scenery became finer as we motored deeper into the mountains and the road much worse. All the plains were fertile and well cultivated, even the sides of the hills being ploughed for a considerable distance up the steep slopes. One village had a fine residence for the local khan. Outside were high defending walls, inside a lovely garden with willows and roses, but the house was an exact copy of a French château! The *anderoon* was enormous and quite Persian, but what disorder, what apparently impending ruin! But there was a rumour that the khan was again to take up his residence and put it all in repair.

Villages were fairly frequent and apparently desperately poor. It is, however, quite impossible to judge from the exterior, for hidden behind shabby, tumbling walls the khan of the village may have considerable comfort, and if not a banking account at least a hidden store of money.

On and on the car bumped until before us lay a great green plain and a town of orange and white tents.

We had found the Ameer.

WITH THE LAST OF THE AMEERS

BEAUTY, romance, hospitality!
Exaggerated?

Not a bit.

Not when you are the guest of the last of the old chiefs of the tribes of the Bakhtiari Mountains.

He said the tents were ours, all of them, the servants which were innumerable, the horses which were numberless. He didn't mean it literally, but for all practical purposes, as long as we were on his high plain, it was perfectly true. We had a choice of a white or an orange tent, the only available colours; of round or square, the only available shapes; and it could be placed where we liked, but great indeed would be the folly of the visitor who, knowing nothing of the wind or sun, interfered in such an important matter.

There was only one limit to service, for lunch must be served at twelve and dinner at 9.30 p.m. You have your breakfast when you ask for it; there is tea, of course, and, marvel of marvels, crisp English biscuits, and if you like, eggs, cheese and bread. At any time during the day you call, and out of the immense plain appear one or more servants who apparently have nothing to do but attend to your wants. The choice is not large, but five good things are available all day long—tea, bread, *dugh*, sherbet and *kabobs*. You must spend at least one whole day in the mountains to decide which is best. At five, about dawn-time, the smiling Persian brought a cup of tea and lots of sugar to my tent with, 'Lady, your tea', and then stood waiting whilst I drank that cup in order that he might bring another. He got such a lot of fun looking at my foreign self and foreign ways, listening to my foreign accent, that I felt I was a blessing instead of a bother. Tea over, I was off before the sun was up, on the lovely, gay white horse—no horses are gelded in Persia—whilst the dew was still on the grass and the mist lay over the plain. When, after four or five hours' riding over grass, stones and brown earth, on flat plains and along precipitous slopes, I returned hot and dusty, there was cold sherbet or *dugh*. Up in the mountains there is none of the usual anxiety about dirty Persian ice, for the ice there is a block of snow, pure white snow dug from deep crevices in the mountains and brought down each morning by cheerful donkeys and still more cheerful 'donkeyteers'. Late in the afternoon is

the time to have tea and *kabobs*. For when we returned, wet and tired, after stalking snipe for miles at an altitude of 8,000 feet, and stalking them successfully, for the Bakhtiari are marvellous shots—what about two snipe tumbling down together?—we were seriously hungry.

The Ameer lives in his great white tent and receives the khans, the heads of the villages, the principal men, to discuss what shall be done with the horses, goats, donkeys, sheep and their produce, to decide about this new tax which has to go to the government, to consider the spirit in which they will accept the new policy of settling nomadic parts of the tribes in villages. At intervals, from 6 a.m. onwards, the Ameer can be seen walking round a little circle of trees, recently planted, perhaps the centre of a future city, bending a little as he walks, but not much, in spite of his eighty years. In one hand he holds a cane with a beautifully-engraved silver top. He wears a European duck suit, but no collar; in the morning a thick overcoat, during the day a fine beige *abba* and in the afternoon an Italian military grey cape. He looks kindly and friendly, almost tender, as he watches children, the helpless, the horses; but if he wants an order carried out, if he is annoyed, there is a succinct crispness about his speech that suggests thunder and lightning and more if necessary.

As he walks he may be administering justice too, for up to the present he has united in himself all the functions of the state. He is one of the few tribal leaders who have accepted the inevitable changes that time is making, and, holding the lives of over a million people in his hands, has saved those lives. On a word or a look have hung the lives of his khans; one of his servants galloping over the hills has carried a message that has stopped a feud, hung a cattle thief or saved a woman from a brutal husband. He has the friendship and confidence of the Shah. It is the law that everyone should wear the Pahlavi peaked cap and not the *abba*, but neither law is too well carried out in the mountains. There is a story that the Shah said to the Ameer, 'I hear you still wear the tribal caps and the *abba* in your mountains. Can it be true?' The Ameer looked up at him and smiled in his quizzical way, 'It is impossible, I am sure, for Your Majesty to be misinformed'. Whereupon the Shah gave him a poke in the ribs and said, 'You are a lot of devils in those mountains, but damned fine devils', and leading the Ameer across a narrow bridge by the hand, for he is rather blind, the two returned to the discussion of serious matters of state.

He is a perfect host, for although he rules one and a quarter million people, and some of them are a pretty handful, he knows whether you

had one or two eggs for breakfast, what is your favourite dish for lunch, how you sang to a 'tribesbaby', what happened when your horse shied, and orders a cow to be specially milked because he knows the English like milk for their tea.

It was a little difficult to know how to behave on arrival, as he was busy at a conference, but he sent a message—'The Ameer is sure you must be tired after the long journey, but hopes you'll have a pleasant lunch with his son, a refreshing sleep and that you will then come to his tent'. The car had taken fifteen hours to cover the long, lovely way up through the mountains and the fertile plains which in Persia are beautiful till nine and then faded by the pitiless sun. Much of the road was bad, even as roads go in Persia, but there are worse in eastern Europe.

Lunch was good, although I did get cramp trying to sit in one position on the floor. The Persian dishes were excellently cooked, the apricots wonderfully sweet, and the clotted Bakhtiari cream left Cornish cream guessing. It was a little shock when the stocking-footed servants, their shoes having been left at the entrance of the tent, walked about on the cloth on which the enormous tray containing our lunch was laid, but to travel is to learn that there are many kinds of cleanliness, many kinds of habits and the best are not necessarily confined to the home country.

After lunch dead quiet settled down on the camp, for in the afternoon there wasn't even any conversation about the three per cent. income tax.

It was too exciting to sleep long that first day. I wondered about the people asleep near me in the other lordly tents, about the peasants resting far across the plain in their low, shabby tents. I was the only woman among all the chiefs, but in the black tents were many women. How absurd it was to think of myself in the wilderness when I had such a gay and large tent, orange outside, lined with bright blue and yellow, a camp bed with a mosquito net, a deck chair, the ground covered with beautiful carpets, a lovely silver bowl in which to wash, servants within call, and yet there was no doctor within 150 miles of pretty bad roads, posts didn't exist, and the animals were driven near the tents at night because robbers did, and one of them, handsome as Apollo, smiled most engagingly as he posed as an innocent goatherd.

I settled down on the deck chair outside the tent and looked over the great green plain to the mountains, which in the afternoon light were momentarily becoming more and more beautiful. Here and there in

clefts were patches of eternal snow which looked aggravatingly cool during the torrid hours from noon till three, but which were a source of all the ice which provided the cold sherbets. The plain was full of animals, horses in one place, donkeys in another, sheep and goats in another. Along the lower slopes of the foot-hills were a few trees, all apricots and plums, some producing minute fruits, a few large, but always sweet, belonging apparently to everybody and nobody. Very distinct were the black tents of the nomads, in groups of twos and threes, often near some trees.

From May till October there were thousands of people and animals in this 8,500-foot-high pasture, but in the autumn it would be empty, the grass growing ready to feed the animals next year, the winter corn beginning to sprout before the snow would protect it until the spring. But in a few years all will be changed, when 150,000 tribespeople are to be settled in well-planned villages built round this and other plains. The few who come up here in cars are no longer to bump and gasp as they make their way along the irregular tracks, but well-metalled roads are to lead to and from these villages, which are to have schools, doctors, hospitals, sanitation. I had the good fortune to be in the mountains at the end of a passing epoch.

The servant who brought tea made a little personal gift, as I was a stranger, of bright green pistachios imprisoned in clear sugar. I watched the Ameer walking with his little group of courtiers, some of them in the enormous local black cotton trousers which really are bags. I was wondering if the time had come to make my state-call, when he left them and came up to me. He had a wide and friendly handshake, an amazingly kind face and a more than gracious smile. I said, 'Please sit down', in my best Persian, which was indescribably bad, and handed him the pistachios. He ordered tea for himself, whilst the servants and courtiers fluttered around his delightful calmness. As he had been kind to me they thought I ought to have a few flutters too. He soon called his young son to sit with us, a shy, handsome boy of eleven who really did enjoy the pistachios.

The Ameer is eighty, or seventy, no one knows exactly; he has twenty-five children by three regular wives, of whom eight sons and eight daughters are living. How he laughed to think he has had so many and I so few. Now he is a widower, the father of a child of two, and, it is said, ready to marry yet again. In his youth he was pretty wild, but now he rises at dawn to say his first prayers and by sunset completes the five devotions demanded each day of the devout Mos-

lem. He has had every possible human experience—peace and war, power and dependence, disappointment and success, women and love too, every sport the mountains can provide, the roughest camp life and an elegant house which is a copy of a French Renaissance château at Tehran. At the end of all these years of doings, he is this delightful person whom it was worth while coming all the way to Persia to meet, broad-minded, ripe, seeing the wood, seeing the trees, having not a single delusion about where Persia succeeds and fails, despising nothing either great or small, an able governor, a perfect lesson in hospitality.

As he rose to leave he asked if there was anything I wanted. 'Yes, please, a horse.' At once two servants departed and I saw them tearing across the plain, returning in a short time with a lovely pure white animal that was mine until I left, and then the Ameer said, in the conventional manner, that I could take it away, just as one day when he lent his glasses he had held them out and said, 'They are yours'.

The groom and I soon made our way over the plain, my horse trying to flirt with every female it met, whether a horse, a mule or a donkey. Now and again there were lively times, the groom having to drive away the coquettes. I had learned some weeks before that donkeys could laugh, but up in the Bakhtiaris I saw them give the glad eye!

Flowers were growing luxuriously along the streams and somehow, as part of this amusing picture, there was always a peasant near to pick what was wanted, to put his hands together in an attitude of submission and allegiance before he handed up the bunch of loveliness. That evening we started to visit the tents, and before I left I knew everyone in the plain and up the sides of the mountains, and delightful people those peasants were, often good-looking, frank, straightforward, intelligent, gay and friendly. After that first ride we were always accompanied by an *amnieh*, a road-soldier. He was handsome and laughing, an attractive companion, always ready for a wild race over the hills, to climb impossible cliffs for a flower, to gallop miles to find cucumbers and apricots when we were thirsty, to whip away the savage dogs which guarded the tents. Whether he came to protect me or to prevent me spying or doing anti-government propaganda I never knew, but it would have been far less amusing without him.

The groom looked upon our journeys as a series of dramatic performances, he the showman, I the puppet; he liked us to arrive at a tent or a village at a gallop and depart in the same gallant manner, and how he loved my red umbrella! When we had to walk he always asked to have it put up as we neared a group—to him it was a kind of triumphant



The Shrine of Shah Na'matullah.

flag—but how difficult it often was to clamber over the rocks, when the wind was blowing, holding on to that bit of colour.

During the rides I learned much of the daily life of the people, for we started each morning before dawn and would get off our horses and spend hours talking and watching. Only the dogs refused to be friendly. The Bakhtiari are a semi-nomadic tribe who live around the north of the Persian Gulf during the winter and in the high mountains during the summer. Until recently they all lived in tents made of black goats' hair, a thick felt for winter and a thin, loosely-woven material for summer, but gradually they are settling into villages and only sending the shepherds away with the flocks.

The nomads belong to the older life of Persia and must go, to some extent, as the new nationalism, with its ideals for industrialism, education and health, makes its way from the cities to the mountains. There are four million nomads, a third of the nation, so that the contemplated changes can only come gradually if they are to be a success. The tribespeople certainly do not produce as much as they might, for a great deal of time and energy is spent in merely moving about and their more important animals, sheep and goats, are often only second grade, the sheep's wool is too coarse for town-needs and the goats produce a very small quantity of milk. In the present state of the roads the donkeys are one of the most important economic assets in Persia. The wool, hair, milk, cheese, butter produced by the goats and sheep are a very important part of the Persian diet and the skins and casings (intestines for sausages) have at times a considerable export value.

The future of the tribes is closely allied to the industrial development of the country, for they are the people who must grow more food, dig metals and work in factories. The tribespeople are not so much lazy as filled with a desire to be free and spontaneous in their working lives. It is impossible to think that the mentality of centuries will be altered in a day, but the stimulus of new needs, of the excitement of crowd-life will have sufficient force to keep their noses to the grindstone of steady, plodding work.

The tribes will have to be settled in villages and there learn new life and new ways, for the lack of cleanliness, which is bearable and not too harmful in scattered open tents, becomes serious in the closely-compressed life of the village. It is not possible to settle the tribes as quickly as was hoped a year ago; this is fortunate, for they now have time to get used to the idea and may accept the inevitable peacefully.

There are three important tribes: 1,000,000 Lurs, 2,000,000 Quashgai and about 1,150,000 Bakhtiari.

The Lurs have been most difficult to deal with; many have been killed, some are in prison and numbers have been transplanted to remote districts near Meshed and Kerman. The Lurs are exceedingly poor; mostly their bread is made from barley, they eat chiefly mast, *dugh* and very little meat, for a dead ewe no longer produces milk or a ram wool. In the old days some of the greatest of the Persian Shahs paid the Lurs to keep their little tricks to their own country, so that the present Shah (and the Persians) need not feel that his dignity is hurt because he has not made these courageous and lawless people either mild or gentle.

The Quashgai are less difficult than the Lurs but still tiresome with their periodical attacks on cars—during 1933 they have been pretty busy at times on the road from Bushire to Shiraz, from Kerman to Bundar, and from Shiraz towards Yezd. It is absurd of the Persian government to pretend that *all* roads in Persia are safe, but it is equally stupid for outsiders to have fear, for *most* roads are safe and the local governors and police do their best to help travellers who seek their advice and, lastly, the European can often choose a safe way.

The Quashgai may decide to settle when some of their belligerent chiefs are seized, but the Shah has made a grave mistake in not always treating them justly. His policy is divide and rule; parts of the tribe have been removed to the north, with the result that there has been a reduction in the number of goats and sheep, so that the cost of milk, butter and wool has gone up. There is much good land available near Tehran and there it is proposed to put some of the tribespeople, the government supplying them with seeds to plant and oxen for the ploughing. Animals need not be reduced in number if they are taken to suitable districts, but the number of cows will have to be increased and the breeds improved. The peasants in the north are using a simple butter machine, so it is hoped that the goat-skin in which butter is now made, and which it is impossible to keep clean, will gradually be abolished. When a peasant buys a butter-maker, he begins to buy milk from his neighbours and so starts a little butter-business. The agricultural schools are teaching how cheaper and better butter can be made. But I met numbers of the dispossessed Lurs, Quashgai and people of the Caspian littoral who said they did not know where they were going or whether they had any place to which to go.

This policy of redistribution may be wise, but it needs a much better organization than Persia has to carry it out decently.

The black tents show up so strikingly against either the sand-coloured desert or the light grass lands that they have inspired a great many pages of romantic twaddle in travellers who prefer purple patches to the truth. Actually the tents are primitive, inconvenient and usually dirty, as they house both the family and part of the farmyard, but the people who don't die in them are happy and healthy, for life is so hard that rigid selection weeds out the weaklings, the unfit and the very old. It is quite usual to have twelve children, but rare indeed for more than four to reach maturity.

The complete publicity of tent-life is repulsive to Europeans, but to the tribespeople it has no disadvantages, indeed probably helps in creating that public opinion which so often in Persia takes the place of the European policeman. The domestic arrangements are very simple. When possible a low wall of stones is arranged at the back of the tent, on which the few household possessions are stacked, the animals' accoutrements, the simple cooking apparatus and the bags of flour. Cupboard-like spaces are made in the walls by means of sticks, the most important being that reserved for the day's bread and the piece of dough which will leaven the next baking.

The journey from one camp to another is often hard and strenuous, especially in the early spring, when the people have to go through deep snows and cross icy rivers to reach the high pastures where the grass is luxurious and nourishing, but ordinarily life in the tents, although busy, is not hard. Under such primitive conditions everything takes a long time to do, but nothing is done under pressure and work which is accompanied by pleasant gossip may be interrupted whenever desired by any amusing, interesting incident that comes along. It is this freedom to put down tools when they like that makes factory or city life so repellent to these free mountain people. They do not know the meaning or value of punctuality. For them only three things have any compelling influence: sunrise, sunset and the commands of the chief.

Each tent contains a man and his one or more wives, regular and irregular, and their various offspring. At the beginning of the day the work is arranged by the man: this woman to weave cloth and that to prepare the goats'-hair rope, always with a simple, pleasant design, which is so important for holding up the tents and loading the donkey; someone to dye wool for carpets, and everyone to spin in the intervals

of doing jobs and doing nothing. One or two women take turns to make bread in the morning, another in the afternoon; somebody has to make butter in the goat-skin, another to boil down milk until it can be mixed with flour, made into small balls and dried for the winter. This, called *kashi*, is sold in the towns and is the only kind of milk which the really poor have during winter.

Each woman looks after her own baby, the attention consisting chiefly of feeding it every time it cries and sewing innumerable charms on to its few garments. The babies have a little swinging cot made of a piece of wood slung between two stakes which can be rammed anywhere into the ground. The groom was sure one of my negro songs would quiet the baby, so surrounded by peasants I nursed the child and did my best, but it didn't like Western music!

The bread is cooked in large flat cakes on a flat piece of iron over a slight hollow in the ground, in which burns a fire of dried horse- and goat-manure. The women are careful not to touch the droppings with their hands during the baking. This job is long and tiresome, as an adult will eat five or six of the cakes at a meal. One day they handed the job over to me but there was more laughter than cooking, as I got hopelessly messed up with the very soft dough. From the point of view of labour, several wives are useful to each other as well as to the man. Sometimes there is jealousy, for the newest wife gets the bangles, the nose ornaments, the decorative coins sewn on to the bottom of her skirt, and as one gay old dame said, 'She may get a bit of pinches too'. Unlike the cities, many men had their legal four wives, but they looked well and happy. The wives are chosen by the parents but at times the men fall so deeply in love that they try to get the girl. The usual dowry, either for a wife or *sigheh*, is twenty-four *tomans* ten *shis*, this sum going to the woman when divorced and to the *sigheh* when she is sent away. The *sigheh* is always a woman from another tribe; she has her children till they are nine, the father paying for their keep, when they are returned to the father. The men beat the women, but both sexes laughed when this was discussed. But some of the men complained that there were women who hit back and would punish them for tempers or brutality by refusing to have anything to do with their husbands for weeks! Divorce is rare, because the man finds the old wives are useful servants.

Girls generally marry at fourteen or fifteen, in spite of the law, but at that age most of them are well-developed and, as they cannot go to school, might as well be married. Girls and boys after ten years of age

are not allowed to go anywhere alone. Apparently illegitimate children are rare everywhere except in Bushire, but it is impossible to be sure of this statement.

There is a general feeling in the provinces that men and women in Tehran are very immoral. The men all declared that, in the mountains, they knew the meaning of love, real love, and one man rolled his eyes as if he were a Spanish *caballero* and sang this song, which was some years ago translated by Sir Dennison Ross:

*Beloved, aught but love of thee I cannot see,
And in my heart all else but thee I cannot see,
Within myself all peace or rest I cannot find,
So out of thy great pity let me see that face to heal my wound.
For other cure but thee I cannot find,
For means of succour without thee I cannot see.*

Everyone listened attentively as the tall thin man, with a long moustache, sang plaintively, everyone except the woman who was making butter.

What a long wearisome job! The sour curdled milk, mixed with a small amount of water, is put in a goat-skin suspended between three sticks and for a couple of hours the skin is shaken by a sudden, violent little jerk. At intervals the bag is opened, a little warm water added, the woman blows into it furiously and the bag is again tied up tight before the movement is continued. The women relieve each other at intervals. Perhaps they quarrel when no one is looking on, but whilst we were guests they appeared to be animated by a model spirit.

Washing does not occupy much time so they are pretty dirty, with the exception of their faces, but even Anglo-Saxon enthusiasm for cleanliness would probably fade away when water was so scarce and frequently had to be carried such a long distance.

The Bakhtiari eat more meat than the other tribes, but it is not for every day. A group of the tribesmen working in the oil fields sometimes buys a whole sheep and divides the meat into as many heaps as there are partners in the deal. A tool belonging to each man is then handed to a European and he puts one by each heap of meat, which then belongs to the man who owns the tool. A great effort is made to divide the meat equally, but favouritism is impossible when the white boss comes in to help. The European has a number of faults, but the workers believe in his justice.

In the autumn, before the tribes go south, the land is ploughed and

wheat is planted; in this district men, not women, usually sow and then lightly replough to cover the seed. Few of the people who live in the tents own animals, as they are merely shepherds employed by the khans. They are very poor, but give an impression of gaiety and content. Two shepherds, aged thirty and thirty-two, said they had never been able to save enough to provide the dowry necessary to get a wife, but they picked up women in various places. The handsome one said he did very well.

The men spend most of the day away from the tents looking after the herds, cultivating the corn, returning at intervals for the simple meals of milk, mast and bread, which are eaten out of a common pot.

Recreation is dancing for everyone and games for the men, and when darkness comes they all sit down round the fire for a short time before they lie down to sleep in rows, men and women, boys and girls together. Mixing the sexes presents no problems to these people. Birth and death take place in public, so the Bakhtiari are not troubled with societies for teaching the facts of life, and overcrowding hardly exists when they can have all the mountain air that can penetrate the thick quilts that cover faces as well as bodies.

The Bakhtiari are an intelligent people, the children doing better than most when sent to school, and yet there are numerous stories about their stupidity when they get into the cities.

A tribesman came down into Ispahan, leading a very fine sheep on a rope. The first person he met said, 'Why do you lead your dog about on a rope?' The Bakhtiari replied, 'It is a sheep', but time after time people said the same until at last he thought he must be wrong and that it really was a dog.

Finally a man said, 'Here, let me cut the rope, the dog will be much happier if it were free', so the tribesman consented and the townsman went off with his sheep. As he was walking along he saw a man looking down into a well.

'Why are you looking into the well?'

'I have dropped a purse filled with gold. If only I could find a man who'd go down and get it I'd give him half.'

'Good', said the Bakhtiari, 'I'm your man'. Hastily taking off all his clothes he went down, but found nothing; nor did he find anything on his return, for his clothes had been stolen.

He then seized a stick and went down the street beating the air around him.

'Whatever are you doing?' asked a passer-by.

'I am trying to defend myself from being stolen', replied the Bakh-tiari.

If anyone is ill he is treated with herbs, or the khan may send him to a distant hospital, but death is accepted without rebellion or annoyance. Amongst primitive peoples it is particularly true that the place of the dead is quickly filled. At Ispahan I saw a wounded Bakh-tiari in a clean Moslem hospital. His flock had been attacked by a mountain leopard and he, a tall and enormous man, armed only with a stick, had tackled the fierce animal. The beast had torn his arms, even broken off one of its teeth in his jaw, but he had persisted and throttled the animal with his strong naked hands. He lay in the city ward, his great brown eyes shining, and on each side of his head, fastened to his pillow, were two little bead-tassels, charms brought many miles by his people to cure him, for they had grave doubts of the city doctor, his anæsthetics and operations.

Most of these quarter of a million nomads are not at all attracted by the snug little house in a village which the Persian government is planning for them, even when there are sanitation, a doctor and school in the background, for they like their freedom and their independence better than anything else. In dealing with the tribes the Shah is up against many difficulties. As a whole the Persian people are democratic and admire men who rise, many of the chiefs and khans of the Bakh-tiari are loyal to the present government, but the tribesmen are believers in aristocracy. 'Who is this Shah?' asked the men who live in the black tents. 'He is no better than we. He has only made himself a king, so why should we submit to him?'

But the nomads will have to go, for their freedom often becomes lawlessness and their own independence has little respect for that of other people.

Many of the tribespeople had never seen a European before, and when I got off my horse wearing riding breeches their first question was, 'Are you a man or a woman?' The women, with practical simplicity, looked down the open neck of my riding shirt to see if I was telling the truth, then made a detailed public announcement of all they had seen. What a relief it was after city life to be in a group of men and women who were frank and friendly with one another because the women were unveiled.

There was an Eastern magic about much of the life. As I wanted to see local dancing, the men and I visited the tents to make enquiries, without result, but when the Ameer heard what I wanted he just

whispered into the ear of his secretary and three hours after we started over the hills to a house where all the men and women in the valley had collected to dance and play games. As we drew near the insistent and not very variegated sound of a drum and a flute came to us in waves. The umbrella was the flag that warned them of our approach, so that the dancers and musicians were doing their wildest when we arrived. To the four good-looking, middle-aged men who were the reception committee I repeated the sentences I had been learning and they conducted me to a porch, a carpet and innumerable cups of tea.

The men and women were dancing in a circle, the men at one side, the women at the other; there were a few simple steps, a waving of the arms and gay handkerchiefs and they all moved on a short distance. All did more or less as they liked, the women undulating with great seductiveness their enormously wide, home-pleated skirts. One woman was coquettish, another grave, another dignified. One man was stiff and mechanical, another as graceful as a mountain goat; one old man was full of quips and cranks, staccato movements of his legs and arms, syncopated wavings of his handkerchiefs (one of them being a bandage taken from a wounded arm). There in the mountains, among this wild people, was every shade of the emotions which might have been ours in a European ballroom. One young man was so upset by the emotion of the dance that he nearly fainted, two had an incipient fight because one pushed the other.

The dance ended and a game, *Tarkeh Bazy*, began, in which a man with a thin stick tried to escape having it broken by a man with a big stick. The holder of the thin stick posed, danced, made feints, jumped this way and that. It was a charming display. Whilst this was going on one of the women wanted to do a special individual dance. Her friends tried to restrain her, but she was a born leader. She wanted to dance and she did, and she did it well. I leant over and presented her with my handkerchief, when, excited by the gift, she danced yet more wildly.

The women punctuated the men's game by a sound like the neighing of a horse. When making this typically mid-Eastern noise they became very red in the face, covered their mouths with a hand, but that did not hinder the thin, clear sound from making the air vibrate.

Next came the camel game; a man on the shoulders of another was the driver, six men holding on to a rope were its body and a man far away at the end was the tail. The driver beat them, made them eat out of their own hats, someone ran here to get corn, there to get leaves, in another direction to load them with stones and bricks. It was lively and

dusty, simple and amusing. The camel-men laughed when they were beaten and we laughed too.

Again more dancing, but this time I dipped a huge lump of sugar into the tea and put it into the mouth of the best dancer. She blushed in the most sophisticated manner and there was general applause.

And then I committed a blunder, for I presented money to the flautist, he being the oldest man, that they might all have a feast. Some days later, when the Ameer had invited me to meet a great number of chiefs at lunch, had put me at his side on his own special carpet, had looked after every mouthful I'd eaten, then invited me to a private feast of giant apricots specially selected for my delight, the blow fell. He said it had been a great pleasure to have me, he had been charmed with my conduct until I had given money to the dancers. That was very wrong, for he, the Ameer, had ordered them to dance. I was his guest and I had not treated him with requisite confidence. It was a most uncomfortable situation, and I'd have given worlds to have been a dog with a really nice long tail that I could have put between my legs. And in front of everybody I had to take back the money. My discomfiture had been planned dramatically.

But, the punishment being meted out, at supper time the Ameer's personal servant came to my tent carrying the usual huge tray on his head, on which was a sheep's head cooked in a special sauce. 'The Ameer's compliments and wishes for a very delicious meal.' I looked at it a little nervously; would I, out of politeness, have to eat those tit-bits the eyes? Thank goodness, they had been removed. And he had ice-cream made. Ice-cream out in the wilderness far from civilization, but as he ate two dishes I suppose he liked it too.

I rode here and there visiting villages, visiting tents and everywhere met with politeness. In the tents a child would be sent to bring a handful of wheat on the ear, a woman would rub it between her hands, winnow it with her breath and roast the grains over the fire. With a stone she would crush some salt, that hard brownish rock salt which has such a snappy flavour, and finally produce a lump of white butter on a metal plate. That charming *amnieh* taught me how to tackle this dish, but expected me to eat from the end of *his* finger. You stick your finger into the butter, dig out a morsel, use it to collect some roasted wheat, a few particles of salt and there is a delicious mouthful! The amount of butter and wheat those two men could eat was really astonishing.

In the village the biggest house and best garden always made me welcome; a padded mattress or carpets and pillows would be brought

out beside a pool, and a meal of fresh cucumbers, salt, apricots and tea. At times I felt a little upset, as the men would look over the fruit minutely and demand what they considered was sweeter or better.

We spent the time one day, whilst my horse's hoof was treated by an icy pool up the side of a hill, under two magnificent walnut trees that had giant nuts. We had hoped to shoot some birds, but as we had seen nothing we had a walnut shooting match instead—'At least making a pleasant noise'—as the groom said. We had lingered much too long, so, to protect myself from the noonday heat, I borrowed a Bakhtiari coat from a peasant. If I had only known before how much pleasure it gave, I would always have worn the artistic but rather rough garment. To everyone we met it was a gesture of real friendliness.

Every day was beautiful, with clear air, blue sky, the changing colours of the mountains, the golden sunset behind the peaks. And night was lovely too, the stars clear, the Milky Way like a near-luminous cloud and the last quarter of the moon bringing premature day.

Thus time passed in the mountains, where, on the surface, all was pleasant and smiling, but underneath there was some heartache, some bitterness and some uncertainty, for the old order is changing, certainly, steadily, and for the better. A large number of the leading chiefs are detained in Tehran by the Shah so that they cannot create unrest or worse while nomadism changes to urbanization, and the local autocratic chieftains give way to a modern, peaceful and efficient bureaucracy.

But when the day was over the khans would forget their worries and spend the whole evening reciting and listening to poetry. Night after night I was lulled to sleep by a great fighter who laid aside his guns and chanted about flowers, gardens and God.

Sometimes in the morning I was waked before dawn by an old man who prayed long and fervently until the sun rose, when he wrapped himself in his rug and slept again till the sun was high. The last day came, and at dawn I said farewell to the moist green plain, the encircling mountains and started back for the city. Three hours' journey away, the car was held up by two smart young men on two extra splendid horses, who came down from their mountain home with an invitation to lunch with their mother, who was the wife of the second in command in the mountains. There it was, hospitality to the very end.

· 3 ·

DERVISHES

‘NOR only is there “no god but God”, as the Moslem profession of faith declares, but there is nothing but God.’

Some are rogues, some beggars, some just lazy, others are depressed with life and a few are learned men.

The first dervish I met lived at the Shrine of Babu-Kirhu on the hill behind Shiraz. The long line of mountains was brown, except for one great chenah tree and a splash of green at its feet; one of the rare springs must be near. Long years ago Babu-Kirhu had found shelter in a little house near the spring, where he had written his *diwan* and finally been buried. It at once became a place of pilgrimage, is a place of pilgrimage today. The present dervish lives in the room where the Babu lies under his tomb. ‘The past and the present are one’, he said. ‘Now is eternity, and death is but an incident in life.’

He was putting water on his tiny garden as we climbed up the hill from the tea-house by the tree, where we had spent the morning looking at Shiraz lying in its lovely plain, listening to a man reciting Hafiz, to a goldfinch singing in the high branches, watching people coming and going, some to stay an hour, others to settle down in one of the rooms for the day. Many asked us the time, not because they wanted to know, but because it was a way to get into conversation with two foreigners.

It was quiet at the tea-house although a man was playing a *tar*, but it was infinitely quiet in the dervish’s home. He left the flowers, asking us to sit down on his simple rugs while he made tea. It was impossible not to be moved by the thought that the great Hafiz had also been in this room and, according to the legend, had here been visited by the spirit of the Imam Ali, who gave him a mysterious heavenly food and said that henceforth the gift of poetry and the keys to all knowledge should be his. The dervish opened his books, read, talked, answered our questions. His face was calm, happy and intensely humorous; in making his way along the ‘Path’ in his search for God he had happily found laughter. He emphasized the necessity for a dervish to have passed through all experiences before he started on his career.

*Though in this world a thousand tacks thou tryest,
'Tis love alone which from thyself will save thee;
Even from earthly love thy face avert not,
Since to the Real it may serve to raise thee.*

This dervish lived quietly with his books and flowers, receiving alms from visitors, talking of his faith to anyone who would listen. He did not think he was a burden to the world, because he asked for so little, and to a few he was able to pass on something of the light that made life wonderful to him, might make it wonderful to them. 'Life and death were as today and tomorrow, you passed from one to the other without any sense of separation.' He smiled at us benignly. In all my life I had never seen such a beautiful smile. He was so happy and pleased that we understood some of his Sufi ideas, especially that I, a woman, understood.

'But Rabia the mystic was a woman', I said.

'Yes, the Sufis see no classes, no nationalities, no men and women; this leaf is part of God even as you and I', and he held up a little faded piece of green. He looked out of the door, across the valley that was emerald with spring, a vivid red here and there with the poppy that is called 'the blood of the lover'. 'A blade of wheat, a petal of a poppy, the love of men and women, all are part of God. The Moslem says there is no god but God, but we say there is *nothing* but God. We do not trouble about Sunnis and Shi'as. Rumi the Master was a Sunni and so was Sa'di. Even here in Shiraz his tomb has been insulted by the Shi'as. The time is coming when those two parts of Islam will unite.'

We quoted the words of the man who lay in the tomb behind us:

*In the valley and on the mountain, only God I saw.
I opened my eyes
And in all they discovered only God I saw—
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
And, lo, I was the All-living: only God I saw.*

'You are Sufis too?' he asked.

'No, only interested.'

His face drooped a little for an instant before the beautiful smile returned. 'In God all are one; whether you walk along the Path sooner or later does not matter.' He got up from the floor, took down a large volume of the *diwan* of Babu and read aloud. We understood only a word now and again, but the sound was musical and soothing. I could imagine being lost in a dream. For the first time I understood the lines of Rumi which had until then seemed foolishness: 'Oh, would that mind and eye might cease from stress of this fierce flood of waking consciousness'. The only creature comfort was the warm, soft air, for, as usual, I was getting cramp from sitting on the floor.

At intervals he looked up from his reading and we knew that he saw what was in our minds. Just as I felt a car fussy as it rushed by a camel, so I felt myself fussy in the presence of this man. He had something that we did not have and it was good. He had a quietness, a calm, a serenity, which was not empty, but creative; here and there all over Persia it existed in some degree, it was the quality of the people that I admired most, but when I asked a well-educated man in Tehran if his people would be able to keep that and also be Westernized, he opened his eyes wide. 'I don't understand what you mean.'

One evening as I came out of a hotel in Tehran I saw a peasant, clothed in a rough blue homespun, squatting by the water that ran along the gutter. In his hand he held a leaf. He was perfectly still. Instead of getting into the *droscha*, I stopped, looking at him.

'If you look at him all night you will never understand his calm, his detachment from the little things which are so important to you and me', said the wise man who had lived so long in the East. 'Life is a slave to that man, but we are slaves to life. Sometimes I understand for a few minutes. It is wonderful. I go back to my office as if I were a god, but I've been here thirty years. That man has no material possessions, but he has a freedom almost unknown in Europe.'

There was no real reason to leave the dervish, but life down in the city called to us, to lunch, to our engagements. I gave the old man the small amount of money necessary to keep him for five days; he stood up, saluted, his hand to his forehead and then to his chest. It was rather like a Roman Catholic crossing himself and I wondered if there was any connection between the two, for, although Islam and Christianity stand far apart to-day, Christianity helped to create Islam.

We went out into the great heat and light of the middle of a May day and clambered down the steep brown track, over the slippery rocks, small stones splattering ahead of us, noisy and agitated.

'Something of the old life is still going on in Persia as it has gone on for thousands of years. We Europeans are new and a little raw.' Thus spoke my companion, a man of great learning.

But down in the bazaar walked the dirty dervishes of the 'Three Steps' and the 'Seven Steps', repeating prayers at the allotted intervals. There I sympathized with the right of the police to cut their long hair, to make them give up their long coats, their little embroidered caps and the loose cloth that is twisted round the head and hangs down behind. There were two dervishes who went about together, the one who looked a hundred guiding the nearly-blind man who appeared to be a

thousand. Five years ago all beggars and dervishes had been entirely forbidden in Shiraz, but the famine of 1932 had created a new poor, who could only gain a living on the streets, as there was no poor-law.

Some Persians who will accept beggars quite calmly are enraged at the mention of a dervish. 'Oh, they are fools rather than rascals', they say.

A couple of months later, as I was walking along a river-bank, I stopped to listen to a dervish who was reciting poetry to a group of men. In his hand he held a rose, upright, consciously and yet simply. It would have been easy to create a legend around this man, for I never saw him with a faded flower, in a land where flowers droop almost as soon as they are picked. He was a fine man with a handsome face framed by long hair which was matted like felt. His hair was revolting, but he was attractive. He had the same beautiful calm, the same lovely serenity, as the dervish of Babu-Kirhu. He looked up at me, smiled, held out the flower, so I sat down at the edge of the group. The evening was very still, the sun sank, making the mountains purple; darkness came, but the poetry went on. We all drank tea and someone in the darkness played a kind of 'cello, the *kamancha*, the music very simple, soft and quiet.

Some of the men were Sufis, some unbelievers, but there is a quality in true Sufists which appeals to men who are religious and non-religious, artists and scientists. The moon was nearly at the quarter that night, a brilliant gold as it hung low between two pointed mountains and was reflected clearly in the still water. Later there came a young shepherd playing his reed flute; the man next me quoted the words of Jalalu'ddin Rumi:

*'Hark how the reed with shrill sad strain
Of lovers' parting doth complain.
"From the reed-bed since I was torn,
My song makes men and women mourn,
Love's pain and passion to impart,
I want a sympathizing heart."*

'But to Rumi those words were deeply religious', I said.

'Yes, but to many of us they are just the most beautiful love-poetry.'

I knew the man had taken a small house up a narrow lane that he might receive, three afternoons a week, the girl he loved but could not marry. She had come to him for music lessons, they had fallen in love, but her parents said he was too poor. As we walked home he repeated, time after time:

*'In a place beyond uttermost place,
In a tract without shadow of trace,
Soul and body transcending,
I live in the soul of my Loved One anew.'*

Before I left I asked the dervish to visit me and one sunny day he came, carrying two carnations which looked as if they were still unpicked, and yet he had walked twenty minutes from the dervishes' house where he lived.

I waved him to one of my two chairs, a Persian to the other, but when he saw that I sat on the floor he sat there too and told us his history.

He did not know when he was born or where, or the names of his parents, but he did know that when very young he had listened to many mullahs, who said that this world was nothing, could give us nothing, so he became a dervish at ten. His teacher was Sheik Behay, who, with three men, Sureh-esraphy in Tehran, Nur-bakh in Ispahan and Habbul-mateen in Calcutta, published newspapers in support of a democratic government. They were only little sheets, but today they were valuable. A man showed me some in Tehran, saying, as he took them out of a box, 'My father died for these and for liberty. He sent me to France that I might the better serve Persia. Just now I can do nothing directly, but indirectly I educate.'

The young dervish became an office boy, printer, writer and student, and soon joined the Khaskhsa order, as that believes in fighting or any kind of active life that will help the fatherland when in danger. His hero had been Abu-Ali-Sinah, who seven hundred years ago had combined great learning with a childish spirit. Pilgrims would come far to ask Abu erudite problems about the Koran, and, having answered them, he would turn to his favourite game of catching sparrows and attaching a string to their legs that they might fly only as far as he desired. Now, as an old man, he still had a great respect for Abu's learning and a tenderness for his childishness.

He became a soldier, was caught by the Russians, who hanged him, but fortunately the rope broke, and, being in a hurry and superstitious, they let him go. He next went to the Bakhtiaris, where there are a number of dervishes, 'because the tribesmen are so intelligent', said he, but joined their army when they marched to Ispahan against the anti-constitutional governor, Ekbalod-dorleh. The mullahs and many others sheltered in the Masjid-i-Jameh Mosque, from which they managed to

escape before it was bombed and captured. The dervish smiled gaily as he told how he and some other dervishes had marched in triumph through the town, holding a flag and singing the *Shanameh* of Firdausi. The army stayed three months in Ispahan while armaments were being made, then went on to Tehran, where Mahomed Ali Shah was reigning. Mahomed, being a tyrant, was attacked and fled to the Russian Legation, and in his place was put Ahmed Shah, who was willing to support the Majlis. The dervish was glad that the present Shah was reigning, as his policy would, through pacification of the tribes and industrialization, lead to real freedom. 'We dervishes believe in the future, so we pray for him; through him Persia will be free, with factories owned by the state and working for the people.'

The dervish remained as a soldier in Tehran for three years, but at the same time he studied poetry and Sufism. 'During those years I learned many of the poems I can now say.' His time up, he went back to the mountains. He had become a wanderer and never married because wives and children would have distracted him from the thought of God; for him a sexual life would have been bad, although for others it may be good. There were dervishes who found that human love has been a step towards loving God, but he had to be dead to that side of the world before he could enter into the spirit. 'There is a great sea of God's love, but only one arrives for a hundred thousand who drown, but that one, by giving up human love, may bring the divine into the world.'

At one time he had owned a house in Ispahan, but now he was living in one of the dervish houses, *Khan-a-quali*, which are to be found in most large towns, and to which wandering dervishes come and go as they like. 'I am happy, for there is calm in the house of dervishes, a calm which comes from God. There we have as our companions Sa'di, Hafiz, Nizami, Firdausi, who still live in their works.'

Some of the lower dervishes smoke opium and *hashish* and drink *arak*, but he knew that all three led to madness. Others say they take *hashish* to escape from the evil in the world and to produce dreams, but he thought that God could only be pleased with the visions that He had sent. He thought some of the 'Four-' and 'Seven-Step' dervishes were useful, because men needed their prayers, but the best dervishes were those who studied, trying to educate the people as well as praying.

'Perhaps Persia will lead the world in seven hundred years. We are

not even ready for a constitution yet, but perhaps we shall be in thirty years.'

'You won't be alive', I said.

'It doesn't matter. I shall have done my part.'

The mullahs too would be very good if they worked; at present they looked down upon dervishes, but they would go, because they knew only about theological questions and little or nothing about God. The future teachers would be the learned dervishes 'who were both one with human philosophies and one with eternal truth'.

Noon had come, and there was a great discussion about his lunch, my servant finally going to the bazaar and returning with enough food for a dozen. I ate vegetables and fruit at the table, while he, sitting on the floor, tackled, quite successfully, the huge dishes of rice and meat. Conversation went on through the meal, but it was only about the cat that lay purring on my lap.

A few days later the dervish brought me some presents, which it would have been rude not to accept and disappointing for him if I had not made a return gift of money. As I handed him the cash in an envelope, he said, 'Everything is love'.

He had laboured talking to me, he too was worthy of his hire.

The last dervish with whom I spent long hours was in the mountains. People gathered about him as he told how they must share all their possessions with the poor. He pointed to a stream that was running near. 'Some great khan says he owns this and makes men pay because it waters their meadows and runs their mills. That is not right.' One of his audience got up. 'He's a damned Bolshevik in the pay of Russia.' 'No', said the dervish, 'I serve only God'. This dervish was very picturesque, as he had long, henna-coloured hair, a very tall embroidered cap, and at the end of his head-dress were long silk tassels. His face was thin and dreamy. He said he was a direct descendant of Zoroaster, to whose teaching Sufism owed much. Whilst talking he periodically went into a partial trance or would walk away, saying, 'Now I must pray'. He always offered tea to his guests and one evening, when it was getting chilly, he put his rug round my shoulders. One day he said he could answer all my questions, on condition that I would go into the desert with him for forty days.

'Whatever should we do?' I asked.

He paused, leant over, looking at me intently.

'*Kharum*, at the end of the time we should both be chaste.'

· 4 ·

PIR BAKRAN

ONE morning as I was walking down the Chahar Bagh, the gentle din of silversmiths competing with donkey bells, the motor horns of *droschas* and the whining of beggars, a man put an antique dealer's card into my hand.

'No, thank you, I'm not buying anything.'

'If you'd just come and look. You need not buy. Everything is in my house and it has some fine old woodwork.'

He spoke with a delightful French accent, was neat, intelligent, a handsome half-Jewish type. Some days later I visited him in the poor and shabby Jewish quarter. The wood in the great sliding windows was indeed fine and exquisite, the small pieces of inset glass old, the green so lovely it might have been made from sections of emeralds. The splendid room was full of antiques and pseudo-antiques. His servant brought out great bundles of old silks, printed cottons, lovely pieces of silver work and tiny boxes of jewellery.

Presently his wife came in and we sat on the floor, talking of life. She was a lovely flower of a woman, delicate, fine, intellectual, feeling that if only the annual baby would cease, life might be splendid. Her husband knew how to sell the beautiful things, but she knew how to appreciate them. I was passing a fine old *kalemkar*, 290 years, through my hands, when I tore it. She looked at me as if I were a naughty child.

'Oh, madame, when you hold anything as old and beautiful as that, you must touch it as tenderly as a lover touches his beloved.'

She rose lightly from the floor, returning soon with a needle and thread with which she mended, rapidly and cleverly, the damage I had done. Now when I see that *kalemkar*, there is not only its own loveliness, but a memory of her tender eyes, her sensitive mouth, the fine finger-tips with which she touched the pieces of old brocades as if they were petals of newly-opened flowers.

They took me to see the well, built under the house, for the ceremonial purifications of the women. It was a splendid piece of brickwork; at the first storey down was a vaulted room, for rest during the hot part of the day, and yet another stage down was the cold well. How terrible is this burden of purification that women, in reproducing the race, have had to bear through the ages!

'Don't you ever rebel?' I asked the wife.

'No', she said, when her husband stood at my side, but when he went away to get a piece of old, drawn-thread work, she whispered in my ear, 'Yes, I rebel. I think myself more clean than he who wears me out with children. If motherhood is good, then all that goes with motherhood is good too. A woman only lives when she has some children, but life becomes death when she has too many. It is better to be a Jewish than a Moslem woman, but sometimes I think I'll be glad when I am asleep at Pir Bakran.'

And then they told me that twenty miles from Ispahan was the Jewish cemetery. So one day I departed, along a way that is optimistically called a road, to visit the dilapidated village, thinking to see only the cemetery and finding the lovely mausoleum of Sheik Mohammed Ebneh Bakran, completed about the middle of the fourteenth century and now in ruins. Few people, either Persians or Europeans, have visited this building and seen the turquoise and deep-blue tiles that have a colour so exquisite, a brilliance so superb, that one has a feeling, in the very act of looking at them, that one's reactions must be exaggerated.

It takes two hours to do those twenty miles, but if you are philosophical about bumps and not over-nervous when crossing bridges, which are none too good even for donkeys, it is a lovely journey between the high, brightly-coloured mountains, across pieces of desert small enough to be picturesque but not oppressive, and plains that are yellow or green. In the distance were villages, cheerful with trees and quaint with the pigeon-towers which are characteristic of this part of Persia. From one place I counted forty-one. These towers, so tall and strong, housed thousands of pigeons, whose droppings were collected and used on the fields, especially for melons. How anything can have escaped from those many hungry birds is the mystery. One very old man remembered that boys used to be employed to keep them off the seed-beds and the tender, newly growing plants, but he told me of an old saying, 'One part of the crop is for the birds, one for the peasant and one for the owner'. Within recent years there has been so much shooting that most of the birds have been killed. Here and there a few pigeons fly round the towers; their valuable manure is collected alternate years and used carefully.

We reached Pir Bakran before it was too hot, first visiting the cemetery, which is in this far village because here was buried Esther, the sister of Moses. There are the remains of the old caravanserai,

where the Jews still camp when they make their autumn pilgrimage. It is said that on their return they bring cold weather back to Ispahan. Esther's body is deep in the ground and over her has been built a simple room, its floor covered with turquoise tiles and on the walls niches for candles. The entrance is only two feet high, so everyone has to enter humbly, crawling on hands and knees. The fat can surely never get in at all. Opening from it is a small room for burning candles or oil placed in little hollows. Esther's body is in the ground, but she still lives, her spirit fills the building, so the Jews hold high festival, eating, drinking and dancing.

Around the tomb are a great many rooms in various stages of decay. In one the burial service is held before the dead go to rest either on the open hillside or, if rich enough, under a brick canopy where all the family lie together, or, if both rich and lucky, in one of the little rooms built as close as possible to Esther. At Shiraz, Persians desire to be buried near their poets, Sa'di and Hafiz; at Qum and Meshed the pious wish to rest for ever near the Moslem saints, and in Europe the great and mighty are buried near the high altar of the churches. Man in face of death is a man, not a nationalist, and humbly seeks to be near the few who are good or great.

Some of the rooms were used for prayers, some were black with much candle-burning; in one of them was a tall, black stone, around its edge hollows for burning oil, but it had a special function. If a woman sits on it for half-an-hour it may cure her infertility, but she must move in a special way, which is considered by the local peasants to represent sexual intercourse.

The tour of Judaism over, the local peasant who was our guide said the only place to lunch was in the upper part of the mausoleum. He undertook to provide a meal. I gave him money and he soon returned with charcoal, meat, eggs, *rogan*, mast, bread, salt, melons and ice. Another peasant followed with four long iron spikes for cooking *kabobs*. The preparations were a little trying as the salt was broken on the floor and the chauffeur mixed it with the meat, his hand being unwashed. I was shocked that the charcoal fire should be made in a corner of that beautiful building, but over it the three men broiled the *kabobs*, talking volubly, as each was convinced he could do it better than the others. They next fried the eggs and finally arranged my cape as a table-cloth!

Long before the meal was ready they had each gobbled mouthfuls of bread, mast and melon. It was very untidy, but I really did sit up

when my well-educated Persian friend drank from the same cup as the chauffeur and the peasant. What democracy! Lessons in hygiene were badly needed.

During lunch the peasant sat just outside the circle and at intervals stretched over to get bread. The meal over, he picked up the bits that had fallen on the floor, gathered all that remained in a handkerchief and disappeared, returning later with a samovar for tea. I had brought my own cup, knife, fork and spoon, but the others used their fingers. It was an unpleasant meal, and when we had finished the faces and hands of the Persians were covered with grease and bits of egg-yolk.

We then all settled to sleep, I on the floor; the chauffeur, in order to keep cool, lay in a deep arch that penetrated the walls; at my feet sat a peasant. After sleep there were reading, smoking and wandering about the building until it was cool enough to go out again. The view through the four arches was lovely, for each framed richly-coloured mountains and fruitful plains. There was a delicious warm breeze, but the flies and giant wasps were a little alarming.

During the afternoon several peasants came to burn oil in the little lamps which stand on the sheik's tomb. Seven hundred and sixty years ago he is believed to have lived in a little hut on the mountains, receiving men from all over the world, who came to study philosophy and theology with him. When he died, a rich admirer built the mausoleum in his memory. His ideas are now forgotten, except those that are preserved in a graceful script which makes the frieze round the building.

The sheik lies in his tomb to help with any need: a bad harvest, a sick child, a lost purse, a sore hand. But he helps only Moslems; the Jews have to go to Esther and the Europeans have to be content with the abundance of æsthetic pleasure.

The design of the building is Sassanian, but in some ways so like our European cathedrals that I felt uncannily at home, just as when squatting under a black tent in a remote plain I heard the words *madar, dukhtar, bad* (mother, daughter, bad). There are a clerestory, a triforium, an ambulatory, and the front is flanked by two towers, each with recessed, pointed arches. Did Europe borrow these details from the East or develop them *de novo*? There are two schools of thought and they call each other names. Women may be cats, but archæologists certainly are tomcats.

At the base of the south wall is a rock with a deep hole, supposed to have been made either by a horse belonging to the first Imam or, according to local tradition, by the horse of their own sheik. Saints and

their horses in Persia, as in Europe, have a way of leaving permanent mementoes in the rocks.

We looked down from the platform where we had lunched at the beautiful *mihrab*, which is very much like the famous ones at the Masjid-i-Jameh, in Ispahan, and in the mosque of Veramin, near Tehran. Unfortunately the lower part is blackened, for the smoke of the candles of the pious is not as clean as their thoughts. In front of it lay a heap of straw belonging to a peasant whose barns were full. It was not in the right place, but it made a shining golden patch when the afternoon sun fell upon it.

High on each side is a frieze of the tiles, which changes in colour and design according to the angle at which it is seen. The effect is curious and fascinating. The Persian government is taking charge of the building, so there is a faint hope that weather and man may cease to destroy. Formerly there were many tiles of various designs on the walls, but the antique dealers have distributed them throughout Europe and America.

As hot noon passed into the ripe end of the day it was a great pleasure to look out to the mountains through the large and beautiful pointed arch that made the west end of the building.

When it was cool enough a Persian and I walked across the desert to see the fairy well and the fairy tree, which stand at the foot of a high cliff. This great chenah tree is the only tree for miles. No wonder well-worn paths lead to it from every village, that on holidays the peasants journey out there to look into the clear water and that they hang rags on the tree to remind the fairies to grant them help in all their endeavours. Pir Bakran should be a happy village, for it has the fairy folk of the old earth, a holy Jewess and a learned Persian saint, but it has almost fallen into decay and a large number of its inhabitants are diseased.

The sun was very low when we left the fairy tree, but we decided to walk the four miles over the plain to the tomb of another local saint that had been beckoning all the day. We went back through the dilapidated village and out into the rice fields where the air, at first pleasantly moist and refreshing, became, quite literally, solid with mosquitoes, which were considered unusually malarial. We had to push them away with our hands.

The blue dome of the shrine had faded by the time we reached it, but there too was a place where men might find help, there too the pious were buried near the great. We were very thirsty, but the nearest

fruit was another mile away. On we went to a little village, all in darkness except for a tiny lamp in the tiny shop and some candles burning in a *sagga-i-khaneh*. We bought some water melons and sat down to eat them in a tiny garden in the middle of the village. We were soon surrounded by a large number of men and boys. A few of them had seen foreigners when they had been in Ispahan, but never before had they seen one eating! So they brought out a lantern to hang on the tree, that not a detail should be lost. That was lucky, as some kind of deadly insect was just crawling up my shoe. It was difficult to eat nicely with a knife, so the Persian asked for a spoon. The villagers were deeply amused that I did not spit the seeds on the ground. When the Persian had finished his melon he gave a talk on patriotism.

I sat on the ground eating the melon very slowly on account of the many seeds, the crowd stood outside the low fence and the Persian leaned against it. To them, Persia was their village, but he tried to make them see Ispahan, Tehran. They were thankful to the Shah for having stopped brigands, but they thought the taxes were far too heavy and, above all, they objected to conscription for two years. The Persian tried to explain why the taxes must be so big, and promised if they were ever men in his company that they would find him an officer who would be as kind and just as a father. They all listened attentively but were not enthusiastic. I was deeply interested in the young Persia that is growing up, filled with loyalty to its Shah, eager to grasp every opportunity to do something towards the ripening of their new nationalism.

When we reached Pir Bakran we found the chauffeur and the peasant preparing rice and an enormous hen for supper, which we ate by the dim light of a lamp. In the middle of the meal we received a message from the head man of the village that we must leave the mausoleum, as during the night it might be possible for us to steal three tiles which were on the ceiling about fifteen feet above our heads. I understood then why one or two peasants had always sat near, even when we slept. Very politely, good-humouredly, they had been keeping a vigilant eye. Supper over, we stumbled along the narrow, stony, irregular alleys to the peasant's house on whose roof we were to sleep. We waited while he swept large numbers of biting insects away, then clambered up an irregular inclined plane called steps. The men settled down on carpets and I on my bed, under a very wobbly mosquito net, which I saw in the morning had enclosed not only me but two mosquitoes, who were gloriously drunk with my blood. There is, however, a considerable

satisfaction in killing a mosquito, even if it is too late to prevent the damage.

When morning came I found we were sleeping on the ruined walls of the town, under a tower which the practical peasants have used for pigeons as well as defence. On one side amazingly-green rice fields spread away towards the plain, which was covered with patches of shining blue mist, and on the other were the crowded courtyards of the village, men sleeping on some of the roofs, but most of the families were packed close together under immense nets, from which, one by one, they emerged, the old and young, the dirty and the comparatively clean, the well and the diseased. Day clothes and night clothes were the same, but they all washed their faces, hands and arms up to their elbows. I did not see one person pray.

'We pray sometimes', said the peasant. 'But we have a great deal to do.'

Indeed they had. Some men had been threshing the wheat all night and many had driven their straw-cutting machines until nine o'clock. The moon being full, it was better to work by night. These men did not have to fear rain to spoil their crops, but they had to hurry to get the land ready for planting millet, for if the seed were planted soon it would sprout quickly in the warm soil. A successful millet crop meant cheaper bread and the release of more wheat to be sold in the city, where the rich had luxurious habits.

I looked down at the awakening people, they looked up at the foreigner on the roof and we asked each other simple questions. One very charming girl wanted me to undress so that they all could have the fun of seeing how my stockings were held up. The small hens and Lilliputian chickens were running about amongst the babies and the manure, the young donkeys kicked their heels gaily while their parents ate straw and tiny boys drove small groups of goats and sheep out to the edge of the village, where the communal shepherd would collect them all.

And day came.

The mist in the valley, the mist that clung to the sides of the mountains, was purple, was blue, was grey, and for a few minutes a lovely rainbow was there too. The mountains glowed, some a solid fire, others a transparent purple.

The chauffeur was very depressed, as he was sure he had caught a cold and malaria and would reach Ispahan too late. Nevertheless, we stopped twice on the way back, the first time at the estate of a prince,

where a friend gave him tea. I walked down the garden and talked to a peasant, who immensely enjoyed his oxen running away from my red umbrella and ate green grapes presented by a minute shepherd. The bright mountains were near, the air was fresh and clean and the edges of the little fields were decorated with huge blue chicory flowers growing on stunted plants. Two hours later the flowers would be faded, the air dry, the bullocks too tired to run and the sheep all standing together, their heads in the shadows cast by each other.

The prince did not often come to his country house, he did not take much human interest in his tenants, but he could not squeeze as much out of them as formerly, as they now demanded cigarettes, more meat, money for foreign pills instead of local herbs, and the women wanted a few yards of gay, machine-made cotton material as well as the coarse, dull-coloured *karbos* they made on their narrow looms. Their standard of life had gone up, but so had the prince's, for now he wanted French soap and perfumes, fine German shirts and luxurious cars. When he came the peasants crossed their arms on their chests and bowed while he rattled out his orders, but his son shook hands with both rich and poor. Social conditions were changing rapidly.

Again the car went on its way, the road brown and bumpy, the mountains sharp and clear in the early light. Across the desert ran a little stream, with young trees growing in a double row on its banks, stretching like a green ribbon across the desert for two miles.

'Those are the work of a dervish. There are his garden and tea-house. Will you go in?' asked the chauffeur.

In front of the mud wall was a bed of bright flowers, protected from too much sun by a vine trellis. The dervish put down mats by the stream and there we settled for tea and talk. A golden oriole sent forth its bell-like notes above us, a willow wren played up and down the stream, fishes tried to catch flies, a frog made a hopeless attempt to swim up stream, a small swarm of immense wasps, their bright yellow abdomens flashing in the sun, darted close over our heads.

This oasis was the work of the dervish, his way of serving God, to do, not to beg, to pray in deeds and not in words. He was dressed like any city-man in European clothes, certainly not smart, but also not shabby; his blue eyes looked dreamily and gently out of his lined, brown face. He smiled as he talked. 'In the old days a Sufist might wander about depending for his bread upon others, but times have changed. Now everyone must produce something, for no one has the right to live on the labour of others. To grow plants is the best. Persia

must have some industries, but at the base of all is agriculture. And I sell tea.' Soon I smelt that he sold opium too.

We had passed an old doctor ambling along on a mule, the animal loaded with books and papers, for he was just returning from a month's residence in a village where he had been sent by the government to alleviate the peasants' dire needs. He had stopped to have a pipe of opium and, finding I had a spare seat in the car, asked for a lift. I said it would be a pleasure to have his company as far as the city, but I learnt later that the chauffeur demanded a fare for the hire of the seat. That is the kind of cheating which is common in Persia and which makes one want to take the next train home.

After much searching, I found only one man in Ispahan who knew anything about the beautiful mausoleum. Few Persians take any interest in their artistic past. 'We are gross materialists and care only for money', said a Persian who has both an intellectual and æsthetic understanding of what Persia has produced. 'But give us time and we will do good work again.'

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THE POETRY CLUB

MY last evening at Ispahan was spent at a meeting of the Poetry Club—it was only one of several in that town and one of hundreds in Persia.

In the road there was dust, thick on the ground, fine and penetrating in the air, our eyes were smarting, our lips dry, but as soon as we passed through the arch and into the garden all was changed. The bed of begonias was bright and fragrant, and although the sand-storm had covered the leaves with a thin layer of brown, they were green underneath and the little pond made the air moist.

On the verandah and in the garden sat the thirty members of the Poetry Club. According to European standards only three were tidy: the five theological students were picturesque but not attractive, for they were wearing ugly turbans; the others were rather tramp-like. More than half were busy making notes on small pieces of paper, for paper is very expensive in Persia, giving the last touches to the poem (*ghazell*) which they were reading that night. Most were drinking tea and a few were smoking the water-pipe. There were men of every age, one so old that he seemed merely a trembling shadow imprisoned in

clothes, and one boy of fifteen so alive, so interested, that it would not have been surprising if the words had caught fire as they fell upon him.

They took turns to read their poems; the first met with much approval, as time after time the writer warned his hearers of the ignorance of the mullahs, who are not popular with the educated or the advanced. The more experienced elders interrupted with suggestions and corrections, for the technique of the *ghazell* is difficult and rigid, but for those who enjoy form it is, when perfect, very beautiful. I soon realized that the members belonged to two groups, those who loved ideas and those who loved technique.

Some read quietly, some dramatically, others almost sang their lines. Everyone was so interested, so appreciative and enthusiastic that I forgot the untidy clothes, the collarless shirts, the unshaven faces. Shabbiness very often does not spell poverty in Ispahan, where the natives are always careful, even mean. In that gathering were Moslems, Bahais, Sufists, but in their common interest in poetry they forgot even those two most important things, money and religion.

The best poet could not read on account of chronic asthma, so he was always accompanied by his young secretary, who had great dramatic ability. As the latter read, the members leaned forward, murmured words of approval, smiled; their eyes shone and now and again one or more joined in the last word of a line. A very lame old man bent forward on his crutch, his face radiant.

Two tall men servants had placed small tables in front of the members, on each a tray with fruit. The one knife and fork was used in common, when the melon was not eaten in the fingers. According to our standards they did not eat poetically, but there was no doubt that it would be difficult to find many groups in England who had their poetical keenness.

I was the only woman who had ever attended their meetings. They had invited me because I had education, that wonderful power before which they all bowed low, and was interested in their poets. As in all the gatherings of men I've attended in Persia, some of them said, wistfully, that they wished their women were free enough, interested and educated enough to be with them. 'The *ghazell* is about women, love and beauty, but we are always only men.'

The artist who sat next me, a tall man, very smartly and neatly dressed, then dropped a bomb by making a long speech in which he pleaded for the modernization of Persian poetry.

'All we are doing is to make bad copies of the great poets, Firdausi,

Nazami, Sa'di, but it would be better if we followed the example of the Europeans, altered the form and introduced modern ideas, so that poetry might be a photograph of life today.'

He made his points by a dramatic use of his hands and large brown eyes. Although an artist who did fine work, his finger-tips, unlike most Persians', were very broad.

As soon as he stopped there was a hubbub, some to uphold the old, some to encourage the new. A little man, young but small and misshapen, was the most eloquent supporter of change. He had come to the meeting riding on a beautiful white donkey covered with a fine carpet, his two crutches hanging at the side.

The quarter moon looked coolly and quietly down upon the noisy meeting, sometimes the crickets burst into song or the *kalyon* made its pleasant gurgle. On each table stood candles, covered by charmingly-shaped glass globes which protected them from wind and insects. The light flickered over the bright fruit, the eager faces, the leaves of a walnut tree.

The club published a poetry sheet each week, with the best poems, articles on literature and—a sign of changing Persia—a series of talks on personal and domestic hygiene.

'It is good to be a poet, but better to be a clean poet', said a young man.

A small boy, dressed in a pink shirt and trousers, appeared from nowhere and sprang on to the lap of the host, who kissed his hair, his face, the back and palm of his little hand, whilst continuing his argument that poetry, even after seven hundred years, should remain unchanged.

The president announced the form of the poem for the next meeting, the club dispersed, but nearly all thanked me for having attended.

'We will tell our women', some of them said. 'They are interested in European clothes, but now we can say that European ladies like poetry as well as dresses.'

One of those men offered next day to help me buy a tray, bargained manfully about the price and—later—accepted a percentage from the shop as a reward.

Of such contrasts is Persia made.

ON TO QUM

I WENT to Qum because it is the religious centre of Persia. I had an idea it would be easier to understand Mohammedanism in this city of pilgrims, just as Roman Catholicism had been more comprehensible after a visit to Lourdes. Everyone said it was an awful hole. The garage told us to be ready to leave at 4 p.m., but they had apparently forgotten to tell the bus to come too. We left at six o'clock!

I waited near a group of closely-veiled women, who were eating pears and whispering into each other's ears without cessation. I was busy with the flies when a young girl opened her veil, smiled and began to fan me. I could understand very few of her words, but for an hour she fanned while I smiled.

The twelve-hour journey was dull and unpleasant, as the woman who shared the front seat was inordinately fat. Everybody expressed sympathy, but why was I so thin when I had come from the land of England where everyone was rich? As usual we stopped many times, and in a remote corner Abbas gave me meals of eggs, tea and fruit. His dignity would have been seriously upset if I had sat with the mob.

We reached Qum soon after dawn and settled in the hotel. It takes every kind of experience to make a journey. The room contained two filthy carpets, a filthier chair and the filthiest table. Abbas started a spring clean, while the porters who brought up the luggage demanded a month's wages! He could not deal with these wretches; I had to mention the police before they'd depart. Abbas, after an inspection, said the hotel was unbearable, he had never seen such filth, the water was salty, the kitchen impossible and we ought to leave. He couldn't put up with as much as I could. I sent him with introductions to the governor and head of the police, to ask for interviews and rooms in the town.

The chief of the police was intelligent, spoke excellent French, was prompt, practical and quite non-committal in answering questions. He provided a very nice officer to accompany me on my journeys through the town and sent for a merchant to show me the carpet-weaving. The

officer, it was explained, was merely a guide, not for protection. Qum is fanatical, but not for a moment was there trouble.

The merchant had looms in a number of houses, all up narrow lanes where the carriage could not go. As I sought every particle of shadow, even if it only fell on my shoes, I thought of the Englishman who said that no one could understand the Psalms until he had been to the East and that there ought to be a special edition printed for the northern climes, and then of the Persian who said, 'How could any European understand Christianity when Christ was so essentially an Easterner, mystical and spiritual?'

We went into queer untidy courtyards and rooms that had once belonged to the rich, for there were remains of fine windows, carved stucco panels and recesses with delicate gatchwork. All the workshops had enough light and some ventilation, though the latter came to an end in winter when the openings were covered with oiled paper. The looms were old fashioned, the women and girls sitting on irregular, uncomfortable pieces of wood, their feet suspended in the air as the carpet rose. But the carpets were particularly exquisite in colour, design and workmanship.

We next visited the town. It is difficult to understand why so little has been written of the Qum bazaars. The long series of pointed arches, one behind the other in a slightly-curving line, was very beautiful. Off the bazaar is the great market hall Ekmeh-es-Jimchab, a magnificent structure of brick, the proportions right, the details good, the lines beautiful. At the corners were little balconies, gracious and fine, with good pendentives in the arches; they were like the poetry which is part of daily life in Persia. I was in Qum only a few days, but often went into this great market which should have made commerce noble. The Ekmeh-es-Jimchab was built only eighty years ago by a local architect who had worked practically with local men and studied all by himself. He also built the Mosque and Shrine of Fatima, the daughter of Mahomet, which is the centre of the religious life of the town. It is impossible to judge its architectural beauty from outside and, not being a Moslem, I could not go in. The golden dome is lovely, but the tiles on the minarets were not attractive.

The *droscha*-man was amusing, for as we slowly made our way along the crowded streets and bazaars he called aloud, 'Make room for the lady'. Foreigners are rare in Qum and female foreigners are almost unknown, so he wanted to tell everyone that he was especially favoured in driving this rare bird of passage who had even shaken hands with

the governor and the chief of the police in the main street. Being on the main road, many Europeans pass through Qum, but, said an Englishman, 'Only a fool would stop there'. 'Then say, "Good-bye, fool"', I laughed, 'for I'm going to stay'.

The bazaar was full of small industries, especially cotton-weaving. The looms, eight or nine, were busy at the back and the material was sold in the front. No middleman there. Many of the small businesses belong to one man. The gay cotton towels used in the *hammams* are made in Qum, the price going up if there is a green stripe at the ends.

The pottery shops were interesting; they had a few really beautiful bowls and many vases of unimaginable ugliness. The pilgrims went home with purified souls and that damned pottery. The great days are now over, for the best potters have gone to Tehran, where the new nationalism may save the old art.

The governor was a capable man who was doing his best to modernize the city. In the great square in front of the shrine he was replacing an old cemetery by a garden, but he had to go slowly, keeping his finger on the pulse of the head of the church. Around the square were shops where the faithful could buy souvenirs, but there was not the vulgarity of European pilgrim cities. Like them, Qum too has its sweetmeat, made of sugar, flour and ground pistachios, moulded into flat cakes and decorated with a few magic words from the Koran. The shops are stacked high with tins, that the sweet may arrive unmelted. Behind these Western tins is a great copper bowl for the cooking. The stirring is easy at the beginning, but when three hours had passed the cook puffed so hard as he manipulated the sticky mess that I almost felt sympathetic when he at last settled down with his opium pipe. In no other town did I see so much smoking. When the day was over and the street noises had at last stopped the air was revolting with the horrid smell of opium.

The governor has now made a rule that goats and sheep shall not spend their night in the town, huddled together in the courtyards under the noses of their owners. He is trying to organize street-sweepers, to have the people vaccinated, to have typhoid-cases reported; the rain-water cisterns have been covered and goldfish put in garden pools to eat mosquito larvæ and petrol put on water where possible. Children with eye- and other diseases are no longer allowed to attend school, but the fight is difficult, for uncleanness, ignorance and religion go hand in hand at Qum, where every step forward is opposed by most of the clergy.

Educationally Qum is the most backward city in Persia, for, with a

population of 300,000, it has schools for only 300 boys and none for girls. The mullahs say that education is bad for girls. Some daughters of the rich are educated in Tehran, ninety miles away, but have to return to imprisonment, that consciously-sorrowful way which may lead to progress.

Qum has two good hospitals in course of construction, one given by a man of Qum and the other by a man from Tehran. Before they were planned the only medical help was in a primitive hospital of thirty beds, paid for by the Great Bishop out of his private income. This Great Bishop is a very cultured man who laid the foundation of the new hospital, helps the poor by large annual subscriptions, wishes to purify the Moslem religion by returning to the Koran alone. His predecessor made strenuous local laws against alcohol, but they were no more successful than anywhere else in the world. He does not believe in education for the common people, but thinks monogamy should be the rule unless a man can give each of his wives a separate house and servant. In Qum four wives and many *sigheh* are the rule and beating is considered a correct Koranic way of dealing with women.

We went to the Madressah Jume'h, where there are the same twisted turquoise-blue faience arches as in the Luft Allah Mosque of Ispahan. The school has ninety students, but few looked intelligent. Those I saw in their lovely courtyard were untidy and sloppy; they were eating water melons, throwing seeds and skin on the ground, for here there was none of the orderliness and cleanliness of the schools at Kerman and Mahun. The mullah students were roughly of two classes—a refined intellectual type and a lazy emotional type. Qum has in its many schools 800 theological students, all living on money left by the devout. It is only recently that the religious have given money to hospitals instead of schools.

At 4.30 p.m. the officer came to take me to a garden outside the city. We drove near the shrine where 50,000 pilgrims, chiefly women, come each year, principally at No-Ruz, for Qum is unbearably hot in summer. It was in this shrine that the Shah beat the mullahs for insulting his wife.

We drove out into what seemed like a desert, as the land was dry and hard, but it was just waiting to be irrigated, ploughed and sowed with winter wheat. In the spring it would be green, and in the summer golden. Here, as everywhere in Persia, there were no tidy fields, man cultivated as he could, where there was water corn grew, but one inch beyond was desert. The peasant is a hard worker.

Far across the plain we saw a group of green trees which we reached after driving for an hour. This was the beautiful garden of the treasurer of the shrine, a great mullah, a Sayid, a famous Arabic scholar.

Outside the walls was desert, but within—what a lovely garden! A tall white house stood at one side, in front of it a great square pool surrounded by beds bright with multitudes of flowers. In every direction were narrow streams bordered by trees, shady avenues, beds of fine pink roses, every kind of fruit tree.

We had had permission to go inside just far enough to see the flowers and mountains reflected in the pool, but a message soon came inviting the foreign lady to tea with the Sayid.

He sat outside his house on a raised dais, nine feet by nine, covered with white muslin. He too was in white with the Sayid's green shawl around his very extensive waist and a white turban on his head. In spite of being ponderous he looked healthy, although he could not walk because of some trouble with his feet. His face was intelligent, kindly, gay, his voice and accent beautiful. He invited me to sit on the dais and ordered tea and almond biscuits, which were so hard that I could not bite them, but he, like a typical Persian, noticed my difficulty and sent for soft ones. Many gardeners were busy watering the plants and as we passed a little water fell on my frock. The mullah at once said a few words to his secretary and the gardeners were sent away. I was sorry, for I was so hot and dry that I would have welcomed a complete shower as much as the wilted plants.

Servants next appeared with three kinds of melons, just picked. There was enough for an army, but he had fourteen opened that I might taste each to decide which was the sweetest. His secretary, with a fork, picked bits out of one after another. I had eaten nearly enough melon before the decision could be made and then—I spilt the tea on that clean dais and the earth didn't open to hide my shame. The secretary handed me really good cigarettes and the end of mine dropped and burnt the muslin! What awful thing would happen next? But that charming man said the burn would be a pleasant souvenir of my delightful visit! He had never before spoken to an Englishwoman, but was glad and surprised at my interest in Persian poetry.

'I very much regret I cannot allow you to see the inside of Fatima's shrine, but I want you to understand that it is not because we are fanatical, but because we are deeply religious', and he said it so gracefully that I wanted to believe him. We talked of Sufism, of the dervishes of Shah Na-matullah. 'He was a great saint, a great teacher, but his fol-

lowers' . . . his expression, his lifted hands put those dervishes where he thought they ought to be, and it wasn't a nice place. What expressive face and hands he had! He was so supremely, quietly certain that he was right, but he was neither petty nor conceited. 'I am glad you have seen the beautiful shrine of Mahun. We had been a nation of artists and we may be artists again. Our Shah is great.' I wondered if the Shah had whipped him too, but nobody would tell.

Night was coming, the sky behind the mountains was clear as crystal, there was a golden glow over the flowers. It was time to go.

'Do you like pomegranates?' he asked.

'Yes, indeed.'

'Please allow me to send some to your carriage, for they are now at their best.'

I was sorry to leave this man with his attractive personality and calm, domineering spirit, but travelling is essentially movement. You see the cream on the milk, but too often don't have time to skim it all off.

I could hardly get into the carriage, it was so full of fruit.

As we drove towards the town, the golden dome and the four minarets were bright with electric light.

I spent the evening on the balcony watching the life of Qum go by, noisy, quarrelsome, poverty-stricken. I watched the family settle down on the roof opposite, the lovely little girl of fourteen married to a grey-haired man. But she was gay and thoroughly enjoyed her bangles, rings, gold necklace, orange-silk dress and pale-blue veil.

By eleven all was quiet and I got under the mosquito net. As the door did not lock, Abbas slept on the floor just outside.

What a night! Innumerable cats came in and knocked over the samovar, the pots and pans. I thought Qum was hell, but in the morning found it was I and not Qum that had a temperature of 105° F. The nearest reliable doctor was ninety miles away at Tehran. We left at four (Abbas carrying the pomegranates in a towel). The chauffeur said it would take three hours, but it was ten hours before that terrible journey ended. The chauffeur liked tea and opium, something went wrong and we did most of the journey on bottom gear. I took aspirins and Abbas gave me pomegranate juice at the innumerable opium dens. The last few hours I kept on repeating, 'Anyway, the car is making such a noise that no one can hear my groans'.

At 2 a.m. I drove up to the American hospital, fell out of the carriage, saying, 'Doctor, quick'. The doorkeeper didn't understand my

accent, but, when I fell again, saw that something was wrong. Oh! a long, narrow, clean passage. A nurse in clean white clothes helping me to walk, a doctor with a nice French accent and graceful hands. Everything white, walls, beds, sheets. Surely this was paradise! Abbas came the next day and he too looked at the whiteness.

'Sandfly fever go quick here. Much better Qum. Qum very bad. Chauffeur very bad. Qum not good for *kharnum*.'

*I count religion but a childish toy
And hold there is no sin but ignorance.*

MARLOWE (*Jew of Malta*).

• I •

ISLAM IN PERSIA

THE present Persian government definitely frowns upon any form of religious fanaticism. It is stated that some in authority disapprove of Islam itself.

The Moslem religion is divided into two main sects: the Sunnites and the Shi'ites, the latter being found principally in Persia. The Shi'ites were, in the beginning, merely a political party which desired Ali and his descendants to be leaders of the Moslem world, but they gradually acquired their own special theological tenets, religious and social observances. Shi'ism was made the national religion of Persia by the Safavids rulers, 1502-1736, who traced their descent straight from Ali, with the political object of freeing themselves from the political influences of Baghdad. It is the historical equivalent of Henry VIII's secession from Rome.

The most spectacular observance of the Shi'ites is the ten days' mourning at the beginning of Muharram, the first month of the Mohammedan year, for Hussein, the son of Ali and grandson of the prophet, who was killed at Kerballa in A.D. 680, when sacrificing himself for the good of his people. During these days black draperies are put up in the bazaars and other public places. So many people wear black that the change in the appearance of the streets is very noticeable, for Persian men usually prefer light-coloured clothes. The *anderoon* becomes very dull, for the gay dresses and bright-coloured or silver-decorated *chadars* of the women are replaced by black or black with white spots. Hussein's picture is hung up in front of many shops, a good-looking, benign man with a halo around his turban and in his hand a villainous-looking two-pronged sword. During this period there are no marriages or any kind of gaiety and the ten days end with a distinctly barbarous procession in which men, after reaching a state

of excitement, even ecstasy, beat and cut themselves with knives and chains. Every year a few die as a result of their wounds, going as a reward straight to heaven. The ten days are busy with gatherings of the devoted to hear pathetic histories of Hussein, at which the audience sings and weeps, day by day becoming more excited and fanatical. Each night is increasingly noisy with the cries of the devout until the last night, when a large town, even now, is distinctly unpleasant, although very much quieter than a few years ago, as the deafening noises are now forbidden. The richer erect tents on their roofs or in their gardens, where, unhampered by the hot sun, they may make continuous prayers and have the mullah address the meeting, called a *Rosa-karneh*. One earnest-minded young man who wanted a reformation of the Moslem religion had a *Rosa-karneh* at his house for ten days, when anyone could attend. This year (1933) nearly 2,000 people were present, between thirty and forty mullahs spoke, some for five minutes, others for twenty. He chose those that would be 'useful' to the people, teaching them a new ethic, not those who were fanatical. This man wanted to drop out commentaries as a guide to life and confine the precepts of religious life to the teaching of the Koran. He did not consider that the Koran regarded shaving as unclean. He disapproved of the idea that it is unclean for a Moslem to shake hands with a non-Moslem and thought that to have to wash three times because a drop of wine had touched one was absurd. He considered that foreigners were only unclean if they did not believe in God, and if they did a good Moslem might sit near them and eat with them.

Within Islam there are a great many controversies about such minutiae as the number of times certain unclean clothes should be washed, but such hair-splitting this man did not allow at his private meeting. The expenses were partly borne by a special legacy left by the father. The emotional intensity of these meetings is very interesting and extraordinary; as an outlet for the repressions of the women's lives they are probably very useful, but they are also exciting opportunities for old men to get a long look at a pretty damsel. This particular young man did not approve of such glances and had clearly indicated to certain amorous elders that they were not welcome.

The last four days are usually holidays, but this year (1933) the Shah has reduced it to three and forbidden the more primitive adjuncts of the processions. Police restriction varied in different parts of the country according to whether the local people were 'advanced' or 'fanatical', the general plan being to modify the traditional behaviour step by step

rather than suddenly, to allow the governors to feel their way and always have the support of a certain percentage of the local people.

In most towns the processions were confined to special parts of the town, such as the bazaars or partly-closed squares in which the religious had to walk round and round. One very enlightened governor said he saw clear signs that reducing the processions to comparative privacy took away a great deal of the glamour from the would-be martyrs. In some villages chains and knives are still allowed, provided the latter do no serious damage; in others the religious could cut their foreheads and no more, but only in the country, before dawn and on condition that they immediately went to the public bath. In yet others no chains or knives were allowed to appear. There is a story that the police in one town said to the leaders, 'If you want to be beaten, let us do it for you and we'll do it much better'. This was going the round of the town as a great joke, for banter about religion is not now uncommon. Certain towns allow sheep's blood to decorate the worshippers instead of their own.

There are general instructions from the central government, but a great deal depends upon the character and point of view of the local governor. There is no desire to cause riots, although every town has sufficient soldiers to put down any ordinary disturbances. It is supposed by some, and hoped by others, that the processions will gradually be entirely abolished. I received special instructions not to leave my house during those most emotional days and when I motored out to the country a village which was revelling in an orgy of devotions would not allow me to enter its gates and I was advised to have the chauffeur step hard on the accelerator. This year the enthusiasm of the soldiers was diverted from Hussein and switched on to the Shah by special parades with augmented bands and organized shouting.

It has proved psychologically sound to hide, rather than forbid, the excesses of this period, which, like Ramadan, seriously upset business and the mentality of the people, replacing steadiness by unbalanced excitement and bringing to the surface any latent discontent—at present the anti-European dislike.

It is impossible to be long in Persia, to talk to many of the young, educated Persians, without realizing that Islam will sooner or later go. But in the meantime Islam is a vivid religion to great numbers, bringing them the same kind of happiness that Christianity brings to its adherents. The Persians were frequently deeply antagonized by the missionaries, who did not realize this.

I spent some hours late one summer afternoon talking to a delightful and devout middle-aged Moslem, who took a real pleasure in helping anyone. He was very busy taking a small quantity of opium, as he had been unable to sleep on account of the heat. 'Life for a strict Moslem is very difficult on the long summer days, for we have to get up before sunrise to pray and that means washing your head, face and hands. Sometimes I go back to bed and sometimes straight away to my factory. It is a good system, for it helps people not to be lazy. If we Moslems prayed properly we would lead a good life, for God is always noticing us, no matter where we are, and He doesn't want us to lie and cheat about money. Now God isn't always near Christians and that is why they have to have so many policemen. Look at the policemen in Manchester, but in Persia we have very few.'

The idea that a man cannot behave unless in his mind there is fear of God, of a policeman or a neighbour is very common. Persians are quite incredulous that anyone should get a non-material satisfaction out of being honest.

Another devout Moslem of thirty said he had spent ten years in a missionary college and had become interested in religions. After having made a thorough study of *all* systems and *all* prophets, including all the minor varieties produced in the United States, he had decided that Islam was best. 'It is obvious', he said, 'that if a mullah refuses to put down his prayer rug and pray on ground which has been filched from the widow, the orphan or the poor, he must have a fine delicacy of conscience which can only lead to superlatively moral conduct!'

But to explain some of Persia's problems he recounted this story:

"There was a mullah who had that particular point of view about the situation of his prayer rug, but on account of the way he spent his nights and most of the money his wife wanted for the modern education of his children, he found his way to the out-patient department of a European hospital. With a pleasant smile he announced aloud to all the company:

"'I have an attack of gonorrhoea. The last attack was cured. This is a new infection.'"

"'You will send your wife to me, I hope. It may be dangerous if she is not treated', said the doctor.

"'No, that is impossible. I can't have her examined by a man. If she does not get better, I can divorce her.'"

There are young Persians, well-educated, travelled, broad-minded, who believe that the Moslem religion, as conceived by Mahomet, is the

best in the world—not only eminently suitable for Persia, but for all countries.

‘You mean for Europe and America?’ I asked.

‘Certainly; in time they too will be converted. All men need a law. How wise our prophet was! He said “Drink no alcohol” centuries before the West thought of prohibition. I know it has failed in the United States and in Persia, but it will succeed one day.’

A keen young Persian with strong sympathies for Christianity obtained a scholarship to study in the United States. He went away disgusted with Islam, but a few months in the enlightened West nauseated him with Christianity, so he grew a beard, bought a Koran, a prayer rug and returned to his native land, a fanatical upholder of the prophet!

In the government schools the teaching of the Koran is frequently reduced to one or two hours a week, the younger pupils repeating the Arabic without understanding and the older having Arabic lessons. In some secondary schools there is no teaching of the Koran, whilst the youngest in the primary schools have four hours a week, the time being reduced as they go up in the school. At present education is not compulsory, so that the poorest and therefore the most likely to be fanatical are not affected by modern teaching. The greatest change must be expected to take place about fifteen years after education becomes universal.

In some of the schools there is an interruption of the lessons for morning and evening prayers, but in others there are no prayers. Everywhere there is an insistence upon scientific training that cannot but have a profound influence upon the attitude of the young towards the innumerable Islamic regulations which limit daily activities.

The Christian missionary schools, which have in the past been factors of primary importance in Persian education and are still very influential, used to teach the Bible, but for the past year that has been forbidden and the Christian school must now have someone to teach the Koran instead, but only for one or more short periods in each week. On the whole, Moslems consider that Christianity is very impractical because it has so many impossible ideals, whereas Islam is possible because it does not ask the unattainable. A clergyman gave an address on ‘Take all you have and give to the poor’ and requested the boys to ask questions.

‘Was this statement an essential part of Christianity?’ asked one.

The clergyman replied, ‘Yes’.

There was a chorus of demands for his coat, his hat, his fountain pen, etc. He finished with very little, but everything was returned.

I came across a similar incident with a dervish, who said he must own nothing; his Moslem audience then demanded his pipe, his begging bag, his cloak. He put them all down in a heap and walked away, but later he walked back and picked them up!

The Mohammedan year also has a number of saints' days, which vary with the locality, but many of these have been abolished. In this, as in a number of other changes, Persia is running parallel with Italy, Russia and Mexico.

The compulsory regulation Pahlavi cap has played a part in reducing the importance of Islam, for only special mullahs of accredited education can wear a turban and its accompaniments, a Persian coat and *abba*, and only a few special Sayids—the direct descendants of the prophet—can wear a turban and a green waist-shawl. These two classes, because of their religious importance, had quite preposterous privileges which allowed those among them of an inferior type to ride roughshod over the laws of the country, and even to commit murder without punishment, but they are now largely reduced to impotence by the cap that proclaims that in the eyes of the state all men are equal. This cap, the invention of the present régime, no longer allows green and black shawls, symbols of a divine right, to paralyze the human rights of the poor and helpless. Men who are Sayids now proclaim their origin by a modest piece of green stuff fixed on the cap and belt. In one town on the Caspian my four porters and the chauffeur all had this gay addition to their rags. Formerly every family had at least one mullah in each generation, that he might protect it against governors, bandits and other enemies. Until twenty years ago only the mullahs administered the laws, which were adroitly arranged for their particular benefit.

The new spirit of nationalism in Persia has some of the elements of Fascism, for it looks back, largely regardless of historical sequence and values, to the time when Persia was greater and more powerful than now and especially to pre-Islamic days—a period of 1,300 years ago. There is a strong feeling of antagonism to, even annoyance with, anything Arabian, as if the influence of thirteen centuries could be wiped out in a day. Some people regard this as a stupid form of passing fanaticism—'Read *The Legacy of Islam*, published at Oxford', said a very learned Persian, 'and understand the folly of this point of view'.

'It is Arabian influence that has spoilt Persia, her material greatness, her moral tone', is also a statement heard every day.

A school recently had to be given a name, but special care was taken that the Persian, not the Arabian, form of certain words should be used. When choosing a word for a foreigner, the Persian teacher will constantly reject the Arabian for the Persian equivalent, and there is a recent order that the Parliament, called since its beginning by the Arabian word *Majlis*, shall henceforth be known by the Persian expression *Khan-goshestan*, or Place of Council. Many Persians are sure that all their faults, especially their tendency to lie, and no Persian denies that, although their ingenious explanations almost make lying a virtue, are due to Islamic influence, for Islam allows, through prayers and pilgrimages, a wiping out of evil deeds, both for one's self and one's ancestors, which, some say, encourages anti-social and immoral behaviour. This attitude of 'blaming it on' Mahomet seems very cowardly. Also, the materialistic paradise of Mahomet is accused of having a degenerating influence upon daily conduct. The Moslem heaven is, to some, only a perfect brothel, where there are not only moon-faced girls but fawn-eyed boys. What, for some men, could be more like paradise?

'What is your idea of a Moslem heaven?' I asked a group of intelligent and thoughtful Tehrani.

'Only the uneducated think of it now as a garden with houris. The prophet made heaven all the people lacked most: a garden for men who lived in a desert, water for a country where it was scarce, honey and women because they were the sweets men liked best. The modern Moslem thinks of it as a delightful place of dreams.'

'No', said another, 'it is a place where one is never bored'.

There is a story that a mullah was telling some peasants that there was a particular prayer which, if said at midnight, made paradise extra sure, with a special reward of a very beautiful houri, so fine and tall that if her head was in Baghdad her feet would reach Shiraz.

'Nothing doing, Your Reverence', said a peasant. 'It would be very enticing to have the lady's beautiful head upon my shoulder, but she is so big that I would not know what was happening to the rest of her!'

This story was told by an ex-mullah of very advanced views and was greeted by much laughter and a discussion as to whether such a *risqué* story should be told to a foreign woman!

Persians usually claim that they are a purely Aryan race; hence much in Islam, which is a partly semitic religion, does not fit in with their psychology. This claim, in face of the history of semitic Chris-

tianity in Aryan Europe, is a little amusing. It seems probable that only a small number of Arabs were needed to conquer Persia and impose the Moslem religion upon the people; hence there would be so little inter-marriage that the Aryan character of the race would not have been greatly altered.

The younger people who have been educated abroad and have had a higher education at home are frequently free-thinkers, although, on account of their relations or their social or official position, they behave as Mohammedans in public. In Persia there is the curious phenomenon of a state religion which the state is certainly deliberately modifying, perhaps reforming and, equally certainly, indirectly undermining. Many educated people consider that there must be a state religion even if it is a reality only to 10 per cent. of the people. There are a number of men who feel lost in this changing religious world and would welcome a satisfactory reform of Islam such as has been aimed at by Mufti Muhammad Abduh in Egypt or Ziya Gok Alp in Turkey, but it requires a subtlety of mind which is not encouraged by modern scientific education to so twist and turn the Koran that it, for example, should condemn polygamy. A supporter of this new exegesis said the prophet definitely did not mean a man to have more than one wife, for he had made the conditions for just and equitable treatment of them humanly impossible, the prophet having indicated that each must have dresses cut from the same piece of stuff, shoes made from the same skin, fruit picked from the same tree, bread from flour made of exactly similar grains of wheat.

Christian missions, the Church of England in the south of Persia and American Presbyterians in the north, have been working hard and splendidly for many years, but have made very few converts. To deduce that they have therefore failed would be a gross error and a very superficial point of view, for actually they have had an enormous influence in teaching the Christian ethic, service to one another, social responsibility, honesty, honour and fair play. Some of the Persian Christians say that Christianity is the future religion of Persia, but there is absolutely no evidence of such a possibility.

Some idealists are troubled that, whilst uprooting Islam, nothing is being definitely given to the younger generation as guidance and inspiration, but, for anyone who looks seriously and without prejudice into the life of Persia, there is no sign that Islam has been either a guidance or inspiration in making the new corporate life, although it has given to the individual a special pride, because there was no inter-

mediary between him and God, and a fatalism, actually a hindrance and harmful in the modern world, which made him capable of quiet endurance and unfortunately capable of equally quiet cruelty. Islam has been a guide in small religious laws of no fundamental significance and has pointed with approval to old habits, merely because they were old, at the same time discouraging progress and education.

Many Persians say that giving up Islam, with its fears of God and *jinn*, has greatly increased petty crimes. They also blame the cinema and Western ideas, yet continue to allow the very scum of Hollywood to be shown; the cheaper the cinema the more scummy the film. It is only by increasing the schools, in which there can be some kind of ethical teaching, that Persia will be able to weather this intermediate period. It seems very difficult for Persians to apprehend that there may be social service and a feeling of mutual human responsibility without any tangible reward.

Some school children once asked a Roman Catholic if it was true that he gained only enough money for his simple life, which they knew was not luxurious.

'Yes. I am here to help you to be better Persians.'

'But some day you will be rich, won't you?'

'Surely you are buying land and villages in your own land?'

'No. I gain nothing. I am here to teach you to get rid of your ignorance.'

Some of them thought him a liar, some despised him and made up their minds to use his quixotism, but a few realized that such a spirit might make a changed Persia and a changed world.

Hence the success of Bahaism, which has encouraged education, given women greater freedom and produced a common social life which is utterly lacking in the strong individualism of Islam. Bahaism is working hard to make converts and helps with enthusiasm any member who is in trouble or distress. No one knows the number of Bahais, but they certainly are increasingly numerous and important. This sect may be a happy *via media* for some during the present period of religious unsettlement, for, by a curious piece of sophism, it is said to be possible to be a Bahai and at the same time a Christian or a Mohammedan.

The Bahais have a very exaggerated idea of the number of Americans who belong to the cult, and an astonishing hope that they may give new ideals to Europe, but, for Persia, it seemed to me a movement of immense value. It is hated with equal fury by both Christians and Mos-

lems, who accuse it of cruel conduct in the past and excess in the present, which, any unprejudiced observer knows, have at times characterized both Christianity and Moslemism. But religious people who live in glass-houses throw stones with just as much enthusiasm as anyone else. In every town in Persia I met intelligent and interesting members of this community, who shaved, did their ties neatly, and on this decent material basis erected an idealism that will surely play a big part in reconstructing Persia.

Educated people in Persia are at present very few, perhaps only a million and a half out of a total population of twelve millions, and amongst those a tiny handful are enlightened, enthusiastic, capable of the sacrifice which alone can make a better as well as a more successful nation. One of that handful said, 'One per cent. of us will save Persia. Perhaps Islam will go; it does not matter, but our ideals will spread.'

Persia has been the home of Zoroaster, of Mani, of Sufis and of the Bab, her people are naturally interested in religious and philosophical questions, but they lack the education to tackle them thoroughly and few at present have any conception of the years of hard work, of the patience and persistence, that are needed for the real scholarship which has laid the foundations of European culture. Possibly the climate is too pleasant for deep thinking, but many Persians do at least wonder about the future of Islam and are busy searching for a guiding thread in the labyrinthine ways between the old and the new.

Perhaps it is true that at the moment the living religion of Persians is education, but that is not going to take them far if they think the latest type of desk is a liberal education, that to buy a book and learn it by heart is equivalent to understanding, that a hotel band is European music; if, in fact, they, with their bright, apprehending minds, seize the externals and, unheeding, pass the essentials.

PERSIAN WOMEN. THE CHADAR

PERSIAN city streets are far from gay, for nearly every woman wears the black *chadar*, a long garment of silk or cotton, part fastened round the waist in front like an apron and the rest draped over the body and head and held close around or over the face with one hand. The most conservative of the poor also wear, entirely to cover the face, the *rabendeh*, which is fastened at the back of the head by a jewelled clasp.

The better-off have replaced the *rabendeh* by a semi-transparent, stiffened eyeshade, the *piché*, which is more or less pulled down over the eyes and suggests the beak of a grotesque bird. This was introduced from Iraq, about twenty years ago, to the western town of Kermanshah and has gradually made its way eastwards until it is found in every Persian town. The costume is completed among the poor or the excessively conservative by a pair of gathered gaiters, which make the legs quite successfully unattractive.

The coloured *chadar*, which has no apron front, worn by some but not all village women, is made of thick cotton material, frequently homespun, which does not fall in pleasant folds, giving the woman an unpleasantly lumpy appearance. One village wears a large black and white check, another crushed strawberry, another a gay plaid. Many villagers are not only traditionally and Moslemly modest, but dread the possible evil eye of every stranger, so cover their faces until only a tiny aperture is left for one eye.

None of the tribeswomen wear a *chadar*, but look confidently out at the world, swinging along alluringly in their twelve skirts, each made of twelve yards of gay material. Their walk is one of the loveliest things in Persia. The amount of the face covered varies greatly with the race and the district, but the maximum is encouraged by the mul-lahs, who are the supreme upholders of tradition.

Persian cities are often 200 to 300 miles apart, formerly connected only by very slow caravans and even now separated by roads that,

although motorable, are none too good; there are only a few newspapers with a small circulation, so that each town is largely isolated, has a strong individuality of its own, which may be progressive or conservative, and knows extraordinarily little of what is happening in other towns. This lack of knowledge is very difficult to realize until one has actually experienced it.

The women of Shiraz are comparatively gay and progressive; a few even have permission from the head of the police to go into the street without a *chadar*. In that charming city many do not wear a *piché* or make any effort to hide their faces. In Bushire women are more conservative, wearing the black *rabende* and hiding even their eyes. The women of Ispahan are indeed well hidden, *chadar*, *piché* and leggings making the streets very crow-like, for that city is one of the most difficult and backward on account of the enormous influence of the mullahs. There, unveiling is illegal, only one woman having permission to go unveiled in the summer of 1933.

The *chadar* is the symbol of the segregation of the sexes, of woman's imprisonment, of man's aggressiveness; many of the younger men and women wish to abolish it, but some of the more thoughtful and serious believe that the majority of men and women, both in 'civilized' Tehran and in the more backward provinces, are not yet ready for so radical a change. 'Women who only have a social life with husband, father and son know not how to do with strange men. And the men is the same with the ladies. If the *chadar* go off now, the men and women are as savages in their life together. We must educate still some years.' That is what a beautiful, educated young Persian woman said time after time. She was unhappy at the delay, but she wanted the women of Persia to arrive at their goal without too many tragedies by the way. She had the patience of a child of an old culture. She wore the *chadar* in the street, but did not wear its indoor substitute, the gay-coloured *namu*, except when she put it on as a compliment to some older woman who still clung to the past.

Yet another woman spoke. 'The *chadar* is only a piece of crêpe de chine; without it you too in Europe have unhappy marriages. If it goes it does not take away bad temper or faithlessness or stupidity. There are people who think, without it, all will find happiness and love. I have been in Europe. I know they are deceive. I want them to be more educated by religion and schools before it goes.' I had seen that woman walking along the street looking rather like a huge blackbird. Under the black garment there might have been a man or nothing. It was like

an automaton passing by. But when she had climbed up the steep stone steps and entered the long room, the figure came alive, burst into flames. A hand pulled the *chadar* from the head, flung the face covering away, unfastened and dropped the *chadar* and she spoke eagerly and fiercely. 'When shall we be free, when shall we cease to be something that a man possesses but does not love or respect? Only possession. Every time I go out in that loathsome *chadar* I feel like a bundle of dates tied up in the skin of a black goat, like a *maund* of flour bought in the bazaar and hidden away, to keep, until someone wants to use me. If the flour is forgotten or goes bad, it is not serious, for there is more in the mill; if the flour is made into sour bread or burnt in the oven, it is thrown away.' She walked up and down the carpets eagerly and noiselessly. 'I want to put everything right at once and it is impossible. I know I must think in generations, my daughter and her son, my son and his daughter, and yet, somehow, we Persians seem incapable of living in future thoughts, in past thoughts. The values are momentary, now is the only time.'

She looked up and smiled. 'I am afraid of patience, for here it so soon turns into lethargy. Help me, woman from the West.'

A thoughtful woman considered that the frivolous were anxious to get rid of this garment chiefly because it prevented them from wearing a Parisian hat and adopting Parisian licence; others again think the *chadar* is only too useful in carrying out intrigues. 'We men are very jealous of our women', said an educated man, 'but it would be better to get rid of the *chadar* and all the deceit it can hide. Men can put on the *chadar* and meet our women right under our eyes.' In Tehran a lady used to drive in a *droscha* to the outskirts of the city, entirely covered with her *chadar*; at a certain point outside my house a large saloon drew up close to her carriage, she dropped the *chadar* on the seat and became an elegant woman who stepped into the saloon to meet an equally elegant colonel. The curtains were drawn and off they went to the country. At a certain hour they were back in the city, where the lady picked up her carriage, her *chadar*, and drove along the street, a black unrecognizable mass.

At present, in many towns and many families, the *chadar* hides the girl from the man until they are actually married and he sees her for the first time in a looking-glass. Many young men now dread the time when their family will expect them to marry, knowing they will have no choice. Under the best conditions they have to guess at the real nature of their future wives.



A Persian dervish and a modern young Persian talking of poetry by a garden pool.



Tagh Bostan, near Kermanshah, seventy-five miles from the Iraq border.

'My mother looks at many girls and then says to me her nose is so, her mouth thus, her eyes big or small, and perhaps I see her once before the marriage, but not alone. I never wish to marry. There is Hussein, who got to know the girl he married, but he will never say how. He was lucky, he really loves her. That is what we want', and the six boys who were discussing the question agreed. 'Life is now sad for us who wish something different. We read in novels and Shakespeare and cannot be content with our relations to women. Never before today have we had tea with a woman outside the family or talked intelligently to one. Now shall we be more discontent but that is often the way to progress. We want the *chadar* to go so that we may know some decent women.' It is possible that the passing of the *chadar* may ultimately be due to the refusal of the men to marry a woman they have never seen properly. To marry is an essential part of the life of every Persian woman, so that even very conservative families are willing that it should be dropped if it is the only way to get a husband. They do not want to hurt their mothers, but the mothers keep the old ways going. To a considerable extent the advanced men feel themselves caught in a net. They want the new kind of woman and yet they are afraid of their own friends, who do not know any use for a woman but one, of the women who see freedom more in terms of jazz and lewdness than in companionship, health and real homes.

The men see the educated girl turning with scorn from the one thing her mother could do well, cook, and they wonder about the value of education. They see a few girls developing in such a way that they lose all feminine charm and again they fear; they see others hating, fearing, loathing men, and they, if they try to keep healthy and decent, feel they are treated badly by this attitude of suspicion. They want to see the faces and hear the laughter of women like their sisters; they want to go out into the country with them to shoot, to ride, to walk, for they are tired of finding companionship only with men.

Persia is alive with problems, as it wakes from its long sleep, and a growing number of men would like to talk about what is happening, but most of the women can only chatter, gossip about their neighbours, their clothes, their servants, but especially their clothes. Out of their lovely flower-like faces comes less than nothingness.

They see the women spend a whole day at the baths, there accumulating enough malevolent and erotic material for three days. They see them marry and become, if well off, utterly slothful, filling their days with sleeping, eating, doing useless sewing, while little by little they

lose their youthful bodily charm and become shapeless, cumbersome lumps.

There is no peace in the home when children come, for the mother spoils them and beats them alternately; it depends upon her mood. There is the constant whining of the discontented child or the yelling of the punished. The young men feel aggrieved that they have had to struggle so painfully into the social ease which they see is natural to the well-brought-up foreign child.

They are tormented by the fear that comes from a knowledge of the worst side of Europe, the headlines of our cheap press, the wild contortions of the cinemas.

'But perhaps if our women are free they will be as in Europe, where, as soon as a man comes home, tired and wanting a friend, his wife always leaves the house and does not return until 4 a.m.', or 'We do not want our women to lose their maternal instinct as in Europe'. Thus they repeat ideas collected from the Sunday press, for many Persians have as foolish conceptions of Europe as Europeans have of Persia.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty is to want to have the cake and eat it, to find a free companion and yet still hold the reins and—the whip! That is the struggle which can be seen going on in many 'advanced' households. If the man can afford, he divorces one wife after another, swinging like a wild pendulum from the submissive woman who accepts the old to the thinking woman who wants the new and then back again. The men know the power to change the women is entirely in their hands, but it requires courage to use this power, to make the break with the past, to take a step forward which cannot be retraced. The fact that Moslem women have been trained to silent obedience to men gives the men enormous powers for good or evil. The result of all this discontent is that many of the more thoughtful men are not marrying, that others want European wives and yet know that the Euro-Persian marriage is rarely a success. One evening I drove out of Tehran to see a fancy dress dance, sharing a car with three Persians who spoke good English. They were all sad because they hadn't found an Armenian girl to go with them; none of the women in their family circles would have attended a public dance. Two felt that they must have a European wife who read books and knew how to make the homes they read of in Galsworthy and *Good Housekeeping*; one was saving every penny to go to England and bring an English wife back to Persia. He hoped he'd find a girl to dance with him at the ball, but he hoped in vain, finally spending the evening watching happier men, drinking and

reading a book which contained poetry on gardens, jokes about marriage and hygiene-talks. There were many other men there without women companions, who were not satisfied with a prostitute.

The educated man is intensely aware that his education is better than the woman's, aware but not always pleased. He reads his Firdausi, that poet of old epics, of imaginary men and women heroes of Persia's pre-Islamic times, and dreams of the woman who will gallop across the hills as bravely as a man, play polo fearlessly, love fiercely and devotedly and, if fate so orders, cast off one man for another, and then in real life all he may do is, once in a while, to walk quietly around the garden with his family and their women friends, the women covered closely in their *chadars*, unless he is in Tehran, when he may go to a club to dance, but he can talk intimately only to men.

To go out for a day into the country with a Persian man is to understand his tragedy. An Englishwoman walks through the woods, her legs and body free; there is a ditch or gully to be crossed—such are in their thousands on any Persian trek—the European woman jumps over. The man looks at her, breathless; is he out with a bird, a sprite? There is a little river and no bridge—'Paddling does it', says she, and sits down to take off shoes and stockings. The man is petrified; is he out with a changeling? Is it possible a woman can behave like that, be so simple and natural?

He is astonished to find that the woman from Europe will go out without a retinue of servants to cook meals, to spread carpets, to fan away flies, and again the man gets an idea of freedom. He is disgusted with his rich women who spend their lives lolling, he is disgusted with himself for letting them loll. He sees the tribeswomen with admiration and delight, women who are brave, intelligent and comparatively free. They are not cloistered, but understand life; in peace they can do anything, and in war they can nurse as befits a woman and fight as befits a man.

So the young men say, 'You people in Europe think there is only the problem of the women. You are blind. There is also the problem of the men. Your attitude to the "women question" is one-sided, you see the apparently obvious, but you do not see the difficult, complicated truth.'

Tehran in its attitude to the *chadar*, as in many other ways, is far more progressive than the provinces. Today there is a secret understanding that if women like to go unveiled they may do so, and if annoyed by any mullah or ordinary civilian, the police will protect them, but, in spite of this potential freedom, it seems astounding to us

Westerners that only 1,000 out of the 60,000 women in the capital go about unveiled, and a number of these, in order not to be conspicuous, talk French or English so that they may be regarded as belonging to the foreign colony. The reasons for this are many and complicated. The *chadar* was at first used only by the nobles, was gradually adopted by the other classes, and today the fact that the upper-class women cling to the *chadar* gives it a social status which is difficult to fight; even in a village where the women usually go unveiled the richer peasant will buy the all-enveloping black garment as a visible sign of his possessions. When all the pros and cons are added, the fact emerges that the *chadar* remains because the upper classes have given it their social approval; it is fashionable, and that word is just as powerful in the remotest village in Persia as it is in a European capital. I spent an entertaining morning with some ragged peasants in a village, which could only be reached by donkeys, whilst they discussed whether they should wear two or three rags round their heads.

In the capital some women go to certain cafés and clubs in their *chadars*, but when there, park them in the cloakroom and dance or talk unveiled; but I doubt if any of the really upper-class women ever do this except at the Iran Club, which is now almost non-existent since the downfall of Teymourdash. A certain number make no effort to hide the face, but even in Tehran, which the provinces regard as quite advanced, the majority of the women, when in the streets, only show the upper part of their faces. It is curious that concerning such a simple fact as the wearing of the *chadar* the majority of Persians only know the truth about their own town. But in this, as in many other things, people believe what they want to believe; hence those with advanced notions in the provinces think that Tehran, the capital of which they are so proud, is full of free, modernized women. There are women who go unveiled in Tehran but wear the *chadar* most carefully at Ispahan or Kerman; even in Tehran a woman may go *chadar*-less in the Lalezar (the main street) but put it on when she visits a friend in the bazaar (the old-fashioned part of the city).

It is only wealthy women who can afford good clothes from their skins upwards, for good materials are expensive and good dressmakers scarce and expensive. Although cosmetics are extensively used, there are few well-groomed women. A hairdresser, trained in Paris, said that many women would not have their hair cut often enough to look smart, as they begrudged the expense. The Moslem man has no tradition of spending much on his wife's clothes, so the *chadar* is useful to hide

deficiencies. It is said that a Persian is quite willing to give his European wife or mistress expensive garments, but refuses them to his Persian womenfolk. A large number of well-to-do women take lessons in dress-making, but the result is usually amateurish.

There are many women, even young ones, so used to the *chadar* that they like it, and other young people who regard it as a national costume and therefore to be preserved as part of the new nationalism. There are also very jealous women who like the *chadar* because it prevents their husbands seeing the pretty women who are potential rivals. Some men like it, 'because it gives a certain mystery and excitement to every walk down the street; each woman in a *chadar* is a possible beauty until you have looked well to find the contrary, and, of course, it is most useful for intrigues'.

'That is why the *chadar* is bad', said a young girl. 'For men get near and try to look underneath.'

'But if that is all you want of women, marriage, being *chadar*-less, must soon pall and you can only be happy by a frequent change.' The man shrugged his shoulders, 'You are right', he said, and I noticed that he did not translate that piece of our conversation for his two wives. Perhaps they already knew so well that it was not necessary. One evening when discussing this question in a well-educated household—we were sitting in the garden, which was lighted with electricity, carpets were on the ground and at our sides were tables loaded with cakes, sweets, sherbets, wines and ices—one woman said she wanted to keep the *chadar* until they could get better clothes, another that it was useful to cover a plain indoor dress which was not good enough for the street. Few women have high ideals of dressing when *en famille*.

Certainly whilst the women's clothes, particularly in the provinces, are so inferior the *chadar* plays a merciful part, for it has simple lines, at times really beautiful lines, and is held with considerable grace by some women. The women want to dress smartly, but most of their clothes, outside of Tehran, are badly made of bad material; the women do not have suitable lingerie or hold themselves properly for modern fashions.

A very large proportion of the Persian women have beautiful eyes and eyebrows, whilst the rest of the face, the body and legs are frequently heavy and coarse, so that the *chadar* usually hides everything but the best. A worldly-wise Tehran woman said, 'You can hold the *chadar* to show your good features or hide the bad. I know a woman who only has a beautiful mouth, so she shows that.' I have seen women who were really beautiful in the *chadar* but from whom I literally wished

to run when the *chadar* was off. The enormous stomachs and thick legs are due to the unwholesome physical life that many lead, sitting long hours in the house, eating many sweets, vast quantities of rice, taking little exercise and receiving inadequate or unwise attention after childbirth. It is impossible to walk properly in a *chadar*, as it clings about the legs, neither arm is free to move and the woman is constantly engaged in holding the garment in place. In Tehran some women dance, even if they take no other exercises, and that alone is making a great difference to their appearance. But it is said that Persians like a fat abdomen and think the European woman quite unpleasantly flat.

The outsider can understand only with difficulty how much the feeling of modesty is, in Islamic countries, located in the face. A recent convert to Christianity was seen coming out of a missionary's house; the upper part of her was a black mass except for one eye and a little bit of nose, but, below, she was, according to our standards, very provocative, as, with complete *sang-froid*, she showed frilled white knickers, pale-pink stockings and deep-rose garters decorated with beads and spangles. Actually, she was a charming, modest girl, happily married. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that for many Moslem women to take off the *chadar* would be the same as for a European woman to take off her knickers. The richer and more coquettish women have lace or open-work let into the front of the *chadar* and, when the weather is very hot, have underneath sometimes only their lingerie.

The face is covered. It is sufficient.

One woman was much annoyed that the *chadar* should still be worn when the face is not covered, that being the part the Koran presumably meant should be principally hidden, but logic hardly plays a part in our sartorial conventions. The actual passage in the Koran is thus: 'Speak unto the believing women that they restrain their eyes and preserve their modesty and discover not their ornaments except what necessarily appeareth thereof; and let them throw their veils over their bosoms and not show their ornaments unless to their husbands'.

The Arab poet Mu'atterez said the veil was a most important part of the art of coquetry, taking the part in the East that the fan once did in the West. A lover kissed a lady through her veil and she murmured, 'My kisses are like wine; to have the right flavour, they must be passed through the strainer'. There is a saying that when the *chadar* is drawn aside, 'The full moon has now become a crescent'.

The Westerner looks at the *chadar* and says impatiently, 'Away with it', but the idealists as well as the conservatives reply, 'Be patient

with us. We see what is and what is not underneath this lugubrious garment. In pre-Islamic days all was different and women were free. How free they were you can understand from the poetry of Shanfara of Azd, who wrote of Umameh, "She set firm her face, she gave no warning of what she proposed, but suddenly the necks of her camels towered above us as forth they sped". She owned her camels, she loved her husband and was loved by him, and she could go as she wished. After some years all women shall be as Umameh, but not yet. For that we work.'

Already there have been enormous changes. Fourteen years ago a woman went out in Tehran to get medicine for her sick father, but as she entered a main street, where no women were allowed after six o'clock, she was seized by the police. Although she explained why she was there, the police were very rough, so, entirely exasperated, she threw off her *chadar* and appealed to a Russian, who at once took her part. The police submitted to the Russian, for that was in the days of the capitulations, when foreigners had their own courts. She then wrote articles demanding freedom and attacking polygamy. A man in criticizing her articles said there was no love or unity in the country, and she retorted that, with a divided home and competition between the children of the different wives, everyone grew up in an atmosphere of discord which deeply affected their whole attitude to life, that the family as the fundamental co-operative society can exist successfully only in a monogamous union.

Many Europeans imagine that the black of the *chadar* is the external sign of black despair and unhappiness, but they are mistaken. The average Persian woman is no more unhappy than the average woman in the West because their demands are so few, their aspirations non-existent; they are brave, often gay in the present and hope for paradise in the future. More than one man said, 'If my wife has a full stomach, a new pair of shoes now and then, especially if they are red, and I don't beat her, she is content'. In spite of the arranged marriages, some turn out very well. There are happy marriages in Persia; that must not be forgotten. It is, of course, very difficult to be sure of the truth. Some people say the women are happy, others that they are miserable or so deadened that nothing matters. Very few women in Persia are lonely, for they always live with servants, relations or other wives and their lives are full of small happenings which give them a certain amount of gaiety and variety.

Their happiness and unhappiness are different from ours.

PERSIAN WOMEN. THEIR DAILY LIFE

PERSIA has a Shah and a government which, as a whole, want to modernize the condition of the women, so early in 1933 a law was passed which greatly improved their life. The law does not state exactly the age at which a girl may be married—that would have brought the law of the state into serious conflict with the religious law—but it is generally interpreted as being sixteen. Few people have any birth-certificates, so age is a matter of guessing. The larger the town the more carefully the marriage age is controlled, but even in small villages, where interference from Tehran seems rather absurd to the peasant, many of the mothers are glad to have the backing of the law in protecting their girls. But they are faced with a new problem—if the girl does not marry till so long after puberty, how are illegitimate children to be prevented?

Marriage now has to take place in the office of a registered mullah, where official papers are kept, and in the presence of a civil representative of the department. The ceremony is in Arabic.

The new law also makes it compulsory for the man to get the permission of the first wife before he takes a second wife or *sigheh* (temporary wife), and a woman has to receive a written statement from a prospective husband as to whether he is already married and see it in the presence of a mullah, when the man must give evidence that he can keep two wives at the same standard as the first. Theoretically this means that polygamy can take place only with the consent of the women; hence a young and ardent believer in monogamy, who spoke of polygamy as 'a dirty old habit' and who wanted Persia to develop quickly, stated with complete conviction that polygamy has been abolished, but on his identity card there were spaces for four wives! It is said by many that not one woman in a thousand will accept polygamy, but the husband can, and sometimes does, say to the wife, 'Consent to a second wife or I will divorce you', and for social or economic reasons she has to accept the position; he can, and also does, persuade a woman to become a second wife on the grounds that he will divorce the first, whom he no longer loves, and then he keeps the first woman because it may be cheaper than to pay her dowry or because he has scruples about turning her adrift.

There is no doubt that the tendency among the better-educated is towards monogamy. 'Only because they can no longer afford to be

polygamists', said a cynic, but the truth is that those who have tried the experiment find the monogamic household, not necessarily a monogamic life, more peaceful, more satisfying.

A young man said, 'I am going to have only one wife because I want her to love me. My father, who had four wives and many *sighehs*, says I am right. Your many wives obey you, they come when you call, but so do your dogs.'

Marriage is, on account of easy divorce, far less certain than in Europe, but the woman has some protection in the dowry. On marriage, all except the quite indigent have a dowry provided by the man; at times a part is paid on marriage, but usually it is reserved to be given in case he divorces her or on his death. Too much is said about this dowry; among the peasants it may be only five *krans*, enough to buy food for five days, and among the better off is rarely more than a few hundred pounds, never enough to keep the woman for more than a few years. It is taken for granted that the woman will return to her family, as there are so few occupations open to women. Very few marry again, as guaranteed virginity is a *sine qua non* of a regular Persian marriage. A considerable number of divorced women go on the streets; hence a number of the 'public ladies' are socially different from those in Europe.

A woman's possessions remain hers on marriage and if she is wise she keeps them, but sometimes she falls in love and hands them over to her husband. He can then, if he wishes, divorce her and take another wife. It is believed that on one occasion a woman did take advantage of the new law to appeal to the court to retain her dowry, as she divorced her husband because he was so cruel, and, further, that the court granted her request. It is possible for a man to deliberately make a woman so unhappy that, in despair, she goes away penniless, leaving her dowry. But there is also the other side of the picture. A man, in order to get a woman who was poor but reputed unusually beautiful, agreed to an enormous dowry; after the marriage she started, with hardly an attempt at camouflage, a number of liaisons. Her husband objected, but she merely said pleasantly, 'Divorce me', knowing he could not produce the dowry. So the marriage goes on.

Divorce takes place because either party desires it, but if the woman divorces the man she loses her dowry; hence, unless very rich, she is actually tied economically. There was an interesting case of a rich old man who married his daughter to one of his elderly cronies. The mother objected, but could do nothing. When the old father died, the

daughter at once divorced her elderly husband, for she could afford to return to her rich mother, who then arranged a marriage with a young man.

The law of 1932 made it illegal to deceive either a man or a woman with regard to the age or looks of the other, so that the old scandal of a man being married to a hag described as a *hourî*, or a girl to a dotard who had been impersonated as a handsome young man, has almost ceased. But I had an acquaintance, a handsome young man of twenty-two, whose parents arranged a marriage for him with a rich widow of forty-five, who could only see out of one eye, was very fat (he on his travels had acquired a taste for the slim), had no education and a bad temper. The widow had handed over to the parents a part of a village which they coveted. The man would have nothing to do with his wife, but quietly worked and saved until he could pay the dowry and divorce her.

I also knew a girl of seventeen who had been married seven months. 'I did not want to leave my own home', said she, 'to come to this strange house and to a man I had not even seen. I was even scared, very scared, when I saw how old he was and knew he had another wife, for my parents had said he was young. For some time I was very unhappy, but he is very kind, so it is all right, but I wish he would not make me drink wine before I go to bed. Of course, it would have been better if I could have seen and loved him, as in the English romances I read', and she looked, with adoring eyes, at her handsome stepson, who was her own age. He looked back with a tender smile and uncontrolled passion is his fine eyes. They were so absorbed in one another that they could hardly speak to anyone else. For the first time in both their lives they had the opportunity of unrestrained companionship with someone of the other sex who was not a relation. Would the husband or the son be the father of the first child?

There is romantic love in Persia, although with the *chadar* it is rare. To the majority of town dwellers who did not read, it was unknown until the cinema came. The cinema in Persia is so awful that even the most thoughtless must fear its effects, but it has popularized and made comprehensible the idea that love includes self-sacrifice, devotion and fair play. Out of the welter of the murders and vice of the oldest, cheapest, worn-out, cut-up Hollywood films, the Persian sees men and women who are ready to lay down their lives for one another. The effect on the Persian is both startling and surprising. The cinema has struck a great blow at the *chadar*, which makes the woman the posses-

sion of her family first and her husband second, rather than an individual with her own needs. No European could have foreseen such a result. The poems of both Firdausi and Nizami have stories of romantic love, but, except to a few, those stories are so far away that they have no effect upon modern life, but the cinema is of today and has come from the mighty West.

The following stories are recent. A man of noble family fell in love with a woman of the lower classes whom he had seen in the street. He followed her because of her charmingly graceful movements. Attracted by his good looks, she opened her veil that he might see her and they fell in love. They had many clandestine meetings in covered *droschas* outside the town and he decided to marry her. The family was very annoyed and thought they could put an end to the romance when it was discovered that the girl was a consumptive, but the lover said, 'Better love for a few years than the marriages I have seen, and if I get ill, well, I shall at least have lived'. They went off to Tehran to be away from their families and there had some years of happiness. She died and he was heartbroken. In a short time he too developed the disease, but, life having no longer any attraction, he refused to take care of himself, stayed indoors, his horses and guns neglected, trying to deaden his sorrow in drink, tobacco and opium. A few months passed and he too died.

By chance I sat one evening by his tomb with a group of mourning friends. 'He died young, but he loved', said the man next to me. 'One of our poets wrote, "A life of misery is perhaps not too much to pay for a moment of love".'

A woman when passing a tea-house heard the exquisite notes of a flute, so lingered a little, hoping to see the man who could make such music. Day after day she returned to the same place and at last saw the flautist standing outside as she went slowly by. Perhaps it was the way she turned her head, for she did not lift her veil, that made him follow her down the street. When they reached a little alley he commanded:

'Lift your veil, that I may play to you uncovered.'

She lifted her veil. A passionate love arose between the two and he approached her family in the usual way, in order to marry her, but they wanted a rich husband for the beautiful girl. She begged in vain, for they were good, conservative, business people, and, from their point of view, she was mentally ill. She was soon married to a rich man and taken to another town. The musician followed, for it did not matter to him where he lived and played as long as he could be near his beloved.

She was never allowed out of her house, but she could look through a window as he passed the house playing. Often the husband or servants came out to beat him, but he merely replied, 'You may beat my body, but you can never beat my soul'. When, one day, she brought a baby to the window, he wrote a poem saying that it really belonged to them, as she had never loved her husband. Some months later the girl died and after the funeral the servants of the husband beat the lover till he died, for they were sure he had cast an evil eye upon the girl. The last words he said were, 'She is mine, not yours'.

It is stated that about two years ago the Shah gave orders that all who liked might remove the *chadar*, but there was so much trouble with men looking, or rather staring, at other men's wives, even making loud remarks and suggestions, that the order was rescinded. To-day the Tehran men stare so uncomfortably in public places that real courage is needed to go into the popular cafés and restaurants alone.

A number of girls are growing up without the *chadar*; it is thought that a generation of women lacking in self-consciousness will thus be created, but others hope that the *chadar* will one day become illegal and simultaneously all over the country the rich, the poor, the old, the young will drop it and that the change will take place as easily as when men were ordered to wear European clothes. Some of the older men then stayed indoors for a few days until they could accept the situation.

Formerly, when the king's women went out, not only were they covered but everyone had to leave the street along which they passed, and if a citizen did not move quickly enough he was beaten.

One day a servant began to beat an old man of 146 years who was blind and doubled up with age. The old man asked why. 'Because the wives of the king are coming, there at the end of the street.'

'Stop beating me', pleaded the old man. 'Even if I could shoot as well as the great Al-Kalil, they are so far that they could not be hit. How much less can the eyes of a blind man do them any harm.' The servant laughed so uproariously that he did not stop even when the Shah arrived, asking the cause of his mirth. When he at last explained the Shah laughed too, and gave instructions that henceforth no one should be beaten to clear the streets.

Thus, it was explained, did the first step take place in the emancipation of women.

Mahomet, it is contended, was a great feminist, for his time, when he limited wives to four and replaced the concubine by the *sigheh*, thus largely solving the problem of the illegitimate child.

By paying a sum to the parents, a man may make a temporary marriage for any time from a day to ninety-nine years; at the end of the arranged period the *sigheh* goes, but the man is responsible for her for three months after her dismissal. Usually the *sighehs* are women of a lower class, and, amongst the tribes, of another tribe. The *sighehs* are the recruiting ground of the prostitutes, but there is a strong sentiment against this form of marriage and it will no doubt soon become illegal, for it has produced much unhappiness. When a Western newspaper has a big headline, 'Persians purchase wives', Persians reply quite justifiably, 'What about people in glass-houses throwing stones? Don't heiresses ever sell themselves to young lords? We are at least honest about our extra women and you are not. Who's the hypocrite and who's the villain in the play?' I have met Persian women who blushed at the word *sigheh* and men who, in order to show the best of their country, swore that they did not exist. Formerly the *sigheh*-marriage was lucrative for the mullahs, for they knew all the available girls and took fees for the introduction as well as for the marriage ceremony.

Mistresses are now replacing *sighehs*; they have the disadvantage that they cannot be taken into the man's house, cannot be treated merely as possessions, demand more consideration and are therefore more expensive, but, on the other hand, the man is not responsible for their children. The Moslem wife accepts the European mistress quite calmly, as the husband will probably soon tire of her and is unlikely to marry her, but she dreads the Moslem mistress, who may easily become the next wife.

Marriage is frequently with a cousin, hence there is much inbreeding, but a *sigheh* is never a cousin, so, through her, new blood is introduced. As she is of a lower class, there is little family pride or segregation of character and ability. The position of the *sigheh's* children encourages the democracy characteristic of Islam. There is a saying, 'Cousin-marriages are made in heaven', because they are often happier, as the partners have more in common, but some fear the effects of inbreeding upon the health of the children.

A Moslem cannot, at present, contract a permanent marriage with a non-Moslem woman, so he marries a European for the longest possible *sigheh*-marriage, ninety-nine years. Moslem women also, at times, enter voluntarily into a *sigheh*-marriage. Very strict, rich Moslems may keep all their *sighehs*, even when the contract has ended, as some consider that was the intention of the prophet. There is in Tehran to-day an old and moral Moslem who has a household of one hundred and

twenty-two persons. He has never let down any of his *sighehs* and is, quite rightly, proud of himself.

Puberty begins about twelve and as a rule there is little difficulty or suffering. Until the new law, marriage was often consummated before puberty and girls were mothers at an early age. Apart from the anatomical harm done to girls married to men much older than themselves, the first birth was frequently painful and dangerous. The fundamental reason for the great disparity of age was the general belief that a young girl rejuvenated an old man.

The girls have babies as quickly as possible and are rapidly worn out and aged. They are frequently misshapen even after one child. Generally there is plenty of milk, which is given to the child for years, not, however, with the idea of preventing pregnancy. As there is a large infantile mortality, it is easy to get a wet nurse. The bottle-fed baby is almost unknown.

The majority of women are still attended by unqualified midwives who have no idea of cleanliness but are anxious to get the job over quickly, so first drag at the child and then at the afterbirth. The village woman squats on two stones above a heap of ashes, and if the labour is long suffers terribly and is shockingly exhausted. It is difficult in many districts to persuade the women to go to a hospital. The tribeswomen have their babies much more easily than the townswomen; a few minutes after, they are often up and about; there is no washing, no care. But, in spite of birth being what so many men foolishly call 'natural', there are no women who regard it as a picnic. The girl of eighteen has a much easier time than the child of thirteen to fifteen.

There is a good deal of puerperal fever, but the death-rate is not as great as would be expected in Europe, as the women apparently have a well-developed resistance to this and other infections, and they need it. The warm intestines of a sacrificed black cock and bits of the Koran are at times introduced inside a woman as a cure for fever, and the women don't always die!

Abortion occurs, but is not common; probably it hardly seems worth while when the child is so likely to die. The women use quinine, colocynth and opium, but may resort to a midwife. Birth-control methods are now being used in Tehran and to a much smaller extent in other cities, but some women complain that their husbands will use certain methods to prevent disease when visiting prostitutes but not to prevent conception with their wives. With the disappearance of the

large family, women may wake up, do more to educate themselves and help the poor and needy.

The infantile death-rate is appalling: some say 80 per cent., others less; there are no statistics. The women have no idea how to bring up their children and there is little understanding of hygiene even in the better families. Hygiene is now taught in a few schools.

The placid acceptance of suffering and death has, I think, a very bad effect upon maternal mentality, but if under the conditions that do exist people did not accept sorrow calmly, they could never stand the strain upon their emotions. 'Will the baby die?' asked a young mother of fifteen in a remote village, with about the same interest as in whether the donkey caravan would start three or four hours before dawn. She had already lost two children, her emotions had become dulled; that, not suffering, was her tragedy. The Westerner usually says, 'Poor thing, how she must be suffering!' But that point of view is often mistaken. Conditions do not allow the finer maternal feelings to develop, but only give the mother superficial, purely animal emotions for her babies. Both mothers and fathers are very sentimental about their children, but have no deep sense of responsibility, especially in the lower classes. A father took his son to have a tooth out, he wept to think how the child would suffer, the child wept too, making a great fuss. The dentist could do nothing and finally, much time and emotion being wasted, the father slapped the child into submission.

Some of the younger men and women are anxious to bring up their children properly. A charming girl who had been educated at an American college and had accepted, gladly and proudly, this new responsibility was managing without a nurse because she realized that a Persian servant would only have a bad influence upon the child. 'I must stay in the house. That is so dull, but this child shall make a better life. For myself it is a very bad time. If I have not too many babies I can do. My husband thinks himself European but he mistake. But my child! Him I will make civilized.' When there are even a few young people like that, a nation must progress.

A woman is expected to have a baby, at the latest, after she has been married a year and a half, and if she does not do so, the husband and both families are deeply chagrined and preparations may at once be made for a divorce or a second wife. At present there is little or no recognition that gonorrhœa is so frequently a cause of sterility. Sometimes the woman makes pilgrimages. On the mountains to the north of Shiraz there is a slide, near a dervish's hut, down which women lose

their infertility and small boys the seats of their trousers, but no one has done any research into the question as to whether the slide or the dervish is the more important.

Probably there are a number of fertility rites. I met one in Agda, a ruined town in the southern desert. When at last, after walking for a quarter of an hour, I met some women, they invited me into their tumbledown rooms, asked me to sit on a cheap rug and offered tiny green grapes and pomegranates. There was much conversation before they learned I had only three children. They then pulled me up from the ground, a woman began to drum out a rhythm on my empty camera case and other women danced round me, singing an incantation for a large family. Suddenly stopping, the chief woman picked up my skirt, attempted to push her hand between my legs, and said I would now have ten children. Perhaps I ought not to have protested, for there may have been a further ritual. I can find no one who has had a similar experience. In that remote place they had no knowledge of anti-foreign feeling; we were just women together, had had a pleasant, friendly half-hour and they were sorry for my misfortune.

Venereal diseases have a very serious effect upon the happiness of the women, for to be unfruitful is a disgrace and in too many families the sick woman has no treatment and is divorced because she is diseased. Women expect a certain amount of sexual life as a right, but it is generally divorced from what we call love. Many women are unhappy because their husbands are impotent at thirty-five. This is alleged to be due to excessive or very early intercourse. A story is told that Nasir-din-Shah sent a minister to Bismarck to learn how he might be a great politician. The famous German replied, 'If your Shah would devote himself to one wife and put the rest of his energy into politics, there would be a chance of success'.

Men in the villages are said to remain potent till over a hundred, and there the women are said to be much more passionate than the men. There was an idea in Ispahan that the calcium sulphate in the water reduced the sexual passions of both men and women. Generally the sexual life of the polygamous marriage is not satisfactory for the women, so lesbianism is common and lovers not uncommon. Some of the richer women even receive money, as their husbands, in their search after the other woman, do not give them enough to keep up their social position. I met a woman in Ispahan whose husband had taken away her car and who depended upon what she could earn to pay for her hired carriages.

There is a good deal of illness among middle-class women because their lives are so unhealthy. The *chadar* plays an unhygienic part, being the cause, some doctors think, of the large amount of tuberculosis among women. Its abolition would make a new era in their physical condition. They are now generally quite willing to go to a doctor, but they do not have nearly enough medical attention when it is available, as the average Persian objects to paying doctors' bills.

The villages had many stories about childbirth. A woman said that one of her neighbours had had a goat instead of a child and another triplets that jumped like crows, so they were put to death at once. A woman was going to have a baby and asked, as a treat, that she might have a lamp, for they were so poor that a lamp was a great luxury. She had a baby and the midwife went to report its birth to the husband, but during her absence the woman had a second; again she went to the husband and on her return found a third. 'Heavens! Put the lamp out', said the husband, 'for if she goes on like this she'll have a hundred babies by dawn'.

Every town has prostitutes, although there are none in the villages. In Shiraz, Ispahan and Tehran their great number even shocks the knowing student just back from Paris. In Tehran the brothels are in a suburb called New City, Shah-a-enoh, and an attempt is made to keep a register of the women. It is said that in October 1933 a law was passed, but not signed by the Shah, making it illegal to keep a brothel and that by the end of December all would be closed. A further clause ordered the arrest of any officer found with a prostitute, but it is open to doubt that this order was obeyed.

Many doctors wish to revive compulsory examination of prostitutes, as they recognize the gravity of venereal disease. It is alleged that the majority of men contract venereal disease sooner or later. Several women said they did not mind the examination, as it was free and taught them how to keep healthy. Prostitutes also wear the *chadar*, which, in suitable places, they pull aside to show their faces and gay spangled dresses. At Shiraz there were prostitutes for women, as lesbianism is probably as common as homosexuality (with boys and men) among men. But both these forms of perversion are becoming less as greater opportunities are allowed for the sexes to meet; this is interesting, as exactly the opposite is occurring in the West.

Prostitutes are said, at the moment, to be very useful as spies for a government which is believed to have so many that there are people who are even afraid to trust their nearest relatives. The European is not

supposed to be very safe in the brothels, as many of the *habitués*, excited and unbalanced by *hashish*-smoking, may give expression to anti-European feeling. Nor does the scrupulous Moslem woman receive them very well when uncircumcised—one prostitute flatly refused such a man, explaining that a day never passed without her praying the five regulation times, and another demanded a double fee that she might give half to the mullah to expiate her sin. But an Italian courtesan always turned her statue of the Virgin with its face to the wall when she received a client. Are the East and the West really so far apart?

How strong must be the religious principles that can flourish in a brothel!

The prostitutes are not at present as low a type as in Europe, and, because they are free to see the world and talk to many people, some men find them more satisfactory companions than their wives. Men have said that among their acquaintances 15 to 35 per cent. were unhappy because their wives were dull.

For the voluntary European prostitute, Tehran is about the last stopping place on the road to hell.

When the weekly holiday begins on Thursday, the poorer women go to the cemeteries and the men to the tea-houses! That about sums up the position of the majority of the women in Persia. It looks depressing to us, but the Persian gets a lot of satisfaction out of weeping and still more out of her tea-party round the samovar, even when in the cemetery, which does not in the least prevent plenty of gossip or racy stories that would make Rabelais blush. Tea-houses are the cafés and the clubs of men of all classes and all points of view; one may be full of business men discussing the prices in the bazaar, another may have only dervishes intent upon poetry, music and mysticism. There is an increased use of gramophones in the cafés, in order, it is said, that the men shall no longer hear the precepts of the Koran which are frequently read aloud by someone of extra piety, but there is no place in the cafés for women. Men and women largely take their amusements separately; that is one of the essential facts in their lives.

The condition of the women varies enormously. Beating is still quite common in the lowest classes, less in the middle and rare or non-existent at the top. But beating is expected from the stronger to the weaker: the men beat the women, the women the children, and all three beat the dogs. It is, however, a phenomenon which is passing—and passing quickly. Police interfere in domestic frays just as they do in Europe and an effort is being made to protect animals.

No one can make a general statement about Persia, for, being in a state of rapid change, there are, side by side, survivals from the early centuries as well as the most modern conduct. But what needs emphasis is that the best and most advanced women do not want to pretend that all is well when so much is bad and they are individually doing their best to improve things within their small circle. Because of their inability to unite, they fail to get beyond that small circle. The Westerner, burdened by the squalor, hopelessness and sorrow, too often forgets to tell of efforts being made to abolish them or the great difficulties in making any change. It is almost impossible for a new race like ours to realize the strength of an enormously old tradition. Human inertia in Persia is unbelievable until you have lived some time in its enervating climate.

There is an even greater contrast between the rich and the poor than in Europe; the poor woman works incessantly, the rich does nothing incessantly, for normally she has a very simple social life, no sport, no time spent on charity and no travel. One man said, 'They simply wish to sit or lie, eat sweetmeats and receive the *salaams* of the men. Some are no better than statues.' There are exceptional women who administer their estates and large households with great ability and masculine firmness. Europeans who have had business relations with them are impressed with their good brains. In Tehran the richer have card parties and at homes, when they are the most charming and gracious hostesses, showing that genius for hospitality for which the Persian man has for centuries had world-wide fame. A beautiful, graceful, self-possessed Persian woman is worth going far to see, but as yet they are few, the majority being painfully awkward with strangers.

Under the ægis of the respectable and loyal society of the Red Sun and Lion, women may find a way to do some useful social work. It is the equivalent of the Red Cross Society, but it has much wider functions. It is the only philanthropic society in the country, but believes that charity begins at home; hence one rule is that the members should attend the meetings in clothes made of material woven in Persia.

Many wealthy women spend some time in the kitchen, at least making sweetmeats and preserves, and all women, if their houses are to be clean, must devote a good many hours to walking after their army of lazy, careless and inefficient servants, who may be anywhere in their great wandering houses.

The children, having been brought up badly, take an enormous

amount of time and energy; they begin life by being fed whenever they cry, are always being nursed and go on in that disorderly manner, the girls shy and the boys, whilst shy abroad, little beasts of aggression to the females in the home. Even in wealthy families the children are constantly in evidence, the well-behaved ones sitting silent while there are guests.

There is one women's society in Persia, *Vatan Khahah* (the Well-wishers of the Fatherland), but its members have lately been reduced from two hundred to forty—a pity, as it was doing good work in giving its members lectures and running a school for adult women. There are two women's papers, whose policy is to hasten the education of women and make them realize that their most important duty is to be good mothers who understand discipline and hygiene and who will teach the children honesty and social responsibility. These papers emphasize that this ideal can be reached only through education. The editor of the weekly *Ayandeh Iran* (*Future of Iran*), circulation of two thousand, is an interesting woman, Fakhe Adel Kheiatbau, who leads a full life, for she has five children, wants more, and teaches in a girls school as well as runs this paper with her husband. She is content with a simple life as long as she can work to push her people forward.

The cinema has made an enormous difference to the women of the towns. In some districts they sit on one side, the men on the other, but in Tehran they may sit together. The cinema gives them a new source of laughter, that fundamental need; a thousand details to consider—whether it is better to sit on chairs or the floor, why a man holds a door open for a woman, the use of knives and forks, the youthfulness of older Europeans, the gaiety and roundness of Western babes. There, the women who cannot read (even in Tehran only 10 per cent. are literate) can see a new and wonderful life, and, being very observant, little escapes them. The cinema, more than anything else, is making the women discontented and from that alone will come change; ten years hence there will be more unhappy women in Persia than to-day, but in fifty years hence perhaps the Persian women will be happier than the Europeans.

The education of women is far behind that of the men, because their schools are new, less numerous and the standard is lower.

The work which the English and American schools have done for Persia is beyond praise; without the influence of the splendid women at the head, Persia would not be nearly as far along the road of progress, for they are teaching the girls to think, to be practical, to develop their

characters. One day recently when a child of twelve was taken away to be married, she turned to her head mistress, 'Why have you shown me a better way? Why didn't you leave me as I was, stupid and careless, content with nothing?'

The teacher looked at her gravely. 'As you are marrying a nice boy, you can bring up your children in such a way that they will help to change Persia.'

In many Persian schools dressmaking, cooking and domestic science are taught, but practice takes a second place. The Singer sewing machine plays a great part even in small schools, not only for making dresses, but for embroidery. To do fine embroidery is very genteel. In a land which has produced some of the world's loveliest designs, the modern woman spends hours producing pussies with bunches of violets or pansies marching in Victorian disarray over a square of satin, which is hung up in the principal room for the foreigner to admire. A little piano, a little violin and much playing of the Persian *tar* is the finishing touch to the rich girl's education. Who would expect to meet the Victorian age in Persia?

It is the ambition of many women to speak either French or English. Foreign languages play a very important part in their progress, for Persia has few modern books. Give a girl a European language and she begins to see the world, in spite of spending so much time at home. Unfortunately the government has a foolish policy of making it difficult to import books because they are afraid of Bolshevik ideas. Whilst it talks of giving the best of Europe to the people, much of primary importance is shut out.

One foreign language is compulsory in the schools in the larger towns, but it is too often taught by a Persian whose accent is bad, whose vocabulary is limited, but whose confidence is immense. One of these professors constantly corrected me because I did not speak like his teacher (who had evidently come from Lancashire) or according to his interpretation of the dictionary. He was so difficult to understand.

Many of the younger men and women, realizing the influence of the women on the children, are anxious to advance women's education quickly. One man even said, 'The education of the present generation of women is actually more important than the men's'. It is hoped that the new Minister of Education (October 1933) will not be like the last, who openly stated that education spoilt women. Two Persian girls were sent to Europe by the government in 1933, but this information was not made public.

Educated women can be teachers, nurses and midwives. Nowhere in Persia is there a proper training for teachers, the so-called Normal Training College in Tehran being only an ordinary school to which are added lessons on pedagogy and psychology, but there is no experimental teaching. In most cases you become a teacher because you want to, but even of such people there are not nearly enough.

Nurses are properly trained at the missionary hospitals and possibly at two hospitals in Tehran. The best training is in the military hospital, where there is one woman doctor, a curious phenomenon in a Moslem country. Midwives have an adequate training only at one hospital in Tehran and there, when the new doctor tried to introduce modern methods, half the students left, for they wanted to attend hospital in street dresses; to learn to make a bed was below their dignity and to empty a bed pan was, according to their point of view, quite out of the picture. But the head of this hospital will succeed in a few years and send out midwives who will be an untold boon to Persian motherhood.

In the provinces I found a newly married girl studying midwifery. She had an excellent English text-book and once a week was coached by a midwife in her own home. She made beautiful copies of the illustrations, proposed to attend a hospital for a month and then start out on her 'deadly' career. She wanted to enter this profession because she thought midwives were so badly needed. 'Why not dissect a rabbit', I suggested. 'Oh, no; that is quite unnecessary. The pictures are very good and I already know many pages by heart.' That is a common point of view which all thoughtful people regret. This girl, intelligent and full of human kindness, only needed the right help to make her into a valuable citizen.

There are about a dozen women working as clerks in the National Bank at Tehran.

A few women, generally not of good class, are actresses and singers, but in no case is it a full-time job on which anyone could live.

Two Moslem women have shops in Tehran.

Monogamy must make a radical difference to the future and with increased medical service women are going to live instead of die. Something will have to be found for them to do. During the next few years thousands will be needed as teachers and nurses, and when the *chadar* goes there will be an enormous demand for good dressmakers and beauty-specialists.

In Persia, as everywhere else in the world, women cling to religion more than the men, but only a few have an intelligent knowledge of

their faith, as the majority cannot read the Arabic Koran. Many of the educated are ceasing to be devout, but only a few have become free-thinkers. The new religion, Bahaism, has a great attraction for women, as it accepts them on an equality with men, gives them education, a place on its councils and an opportunity for social intercourse. This body is doing splendid work in starting girls schools all over the country. In their schools I found a number of intelligent and earnest-minded women who were modest about their learning but anxious to do their best for the students, inspired by the hope that in this time of national change they were playing a worthy part. When talking to these women I felt that neither race nor nationality was any barrier between us.

What has happened in the West will happen in the East, but the Persian woman will probably reach her freedom without so many women having to pass through the stage of unscientific feminism which was founded upon an effort to become men rather than to be free women, though what freedom really is they understand as little as we do. There will be struggles, there will be unhappiness, greatest in those marriages between an advanced woman and a man who thinks he is advanced but who believes he can have the pleasure of a companion and simultaneously the submission of a child.

An unusually able man, aged only forty, said fiercely, 'We of the East will keep our Eastern ideas of women, the *chadar*, complete obedience, no contact with other men', and then quoted with gusto this proverb: 'A wise man has copper dishes that they may not break, strong carpets that they may not wear out, but he keeps each wife only a short time and finds his pleasures in the bazaar.' But that man will die and those who take his place will have a different point of view.

Undoubtedly, if conditions were improved, the women of all classes would get much more out of life than they do today and, what is of equal importance, they could add their share of ability, energy and care to the development of the nation. The women of Persia will reach freedom by bringing up sons with new ideas, who will be encouraged by the best men of to-day.

There are two things in Persia I would not like to be—a donkey or a woman; but, from the old point of view, the woman has no responsibility, finds plenty of laughter, and the donkey feeds on flowers in the spring and in summer rolls luxuriously on the hot sand, although his pack is often too heavy and the nail his driver sticks into him in a special open wound is both sharp and long.

There is a rumour that the *chadar* will go next year. I hope not, for the country is by no means ready for such an adventure, but an order that no girl who is now nine should ever wear it would be a wise and gentle way of progressing to new habits.

Let us cease from judging only from our point of view, let us get under the *chadar* as well as see it from outside, for Persia needs the encouragement and not the scorn of the West.

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THE GIRL LEILA

This true story sums up the past, present and future of women in Persia

LEILA was thirteen years old, a gay, happy, industrious schoolgirl, her eager mind absorbing with intense enthusiasm the strange ideas brought to her remote town by the teacher who, having been left a widow with some money, had braved the disapproval of her relations by going to study, first in Tehran and later in the wonderful land of Europe, where women were not despised, where they were rarely beaten, where they were loved tenderly, where their thoughts and ideas were not disregarded, where they all read and some even wrote books!

Every day a little more pride grew in Leila's mind and she planned how she would love her husband as Shireen loved Koshru in the old poems and bring up children who would make Persia clean, clever and splendid.

One day she came home from school, very happy, for the teacher had praised her. She sang as she walked across the courtyard where the air was moist and fragrant, for there were roses on the bushes and the hot stones had just been watered. She dabbled her finger in the pool, hoping the goldfish would not run away, she laughed as the light caught their shining, moving bodies, and so she passed into the house, where her gaiety suddenly ceased.

There was a pair of new shoes, there were great quantities of cakes and sweetmeats.

A wedding!

But she was the only person who could be married.

She ran to her mother. 'Yes, yes, you are going to be married to-night, to Ali; he is young—only eighteen—and rich.'

The girl cried out of horror, 'But he is bad. I know about him, how he is diseased and has had five wives and one died of his illness, and one is in the hospital with it and one went mad and the others left him in a few months. If you know about him you cannot want me to marry him.'

'He is rich', said the mother and the father and the grandparents and all the relations.

Leila went out of the house quickly, waited near the great door of the compound until there was no servant about, then, wrapping her *chadar* tightly around her, hurried to her teacher.

'Help me!' she cried. Together they went to an uncle who had newer ideas because he had been in Tehran. The three returned to the father. They all talked and talked, at first amicably, but finally the uncle threatened to tell the police if the father compelled the girl to be married without her consent. At last the father gave the teacher a written statement that the girl should not be married unless she agreed.

The guests were sent away. The teacher walked along the dim, narrow streets, deeply troubled, for she had little faith in the paper she held so closely in her hand. The girl slept happily.

Next morning Leila was at school as usual and the day after too, but the third day she did not appear and in the evening came an invitation to attend her wedding, which would take place in a few days, and a paper on which she had given consent to the marriage.

Leila had been kept awake all night, had been bullied and tormented by her relations, especially her grandmother, till, in despair, she had given way. The teacher, in spite of her disgust with the relations, decided to accept the invitation in the hope that she might still help the girl.

This time the marriage took place in the man's house, only very near relations were present and there was no feasting. It was sad and depressing, for the little bride was white and trembling.

When the ceremony was over a friend of Leila's whispered into the teacher's ear, 'Even now there is a chance of escape'. And suddenly the young bride went to the well, climbed up on the edge and said, 'I will jump in unless you take me home'.

With a cry the mother rushed at her, 'Come, you shall not live with that man', and she led her daughter away. The husband followed and was allowed to have a room in his bride's home on condition that he did not live with the girl until she had consented. Weeks went by and the father-in-law was so disgusted with the man that he suggested the

young people should go to stay with a relation in the country to give Ali a chance to be cured and turn over a new leaf.

The young people lived in the village for two years, the girl refusing to be a wife although her relations came every Friday, to persuade her to consent in order that they might have the money.

Finally, the girl being now fifteen, the husband left her and she returned to school, crushed, old, inactive. All her energy had gone into resistance to the horror that had been hanging over her for two years; she could endure, but she had forgotten how to do.

The teacher, who in the meantime had gone to France to study psychology, surrounded the bruised child-woman with tenderness and finally persuaded her to work for a certificate. Leila changed gradually, she moved about the room less slowly, she began to be able to attend a little to her lessons, at moments the look of fear and suspicion left her great dark eyes.

Eight months passed and the man died.

The relations turned on her with fury, for the money was lost for ever, but Leila was calm and quiet. She did not blame them for what they had tried to do to her, she even felt a little pity for their unknowing cruelty. She was mature, they were merely grown-up children, but she determined to study, to become a great teacher who would slowly alter the lives of many girls.

Leila was sure of herself and of the future of her people.

TEHRAN—WHEN THE JASMINE BLOOMS

As I lay in the hospital I realized, as each golden day succeeded the last, that at every minute, somewhere in the world, there was a dawn, somewhere a noon, somewhere a sunset and somewhere a night.

Thus was I suitably introduced to the cosmopolitan world of Persia's capital. I did not like the city of Tehran, but I was very sorry to leave the many delightful and interesting people I met there. I would like to go back if I could have a guarantee that the censor, after interviewing my innocent domestic correspondence, would pass it on with reasonable rapidity.

Tehran is largely clean; that is something. Tehran is ugly; that is something too, although rather unbearable. Tehran shouts nationalism all day when it is sober and that half of the night when it is not drunk. It has, until quite recently, scorned its own splendid architecture and has copied some of the deadliest European horrors. The Persian mason, apparently without effort and with little or no apparatus, will make a delightful arch, but the lords of Tehran have prostituted his labours and his natural ability has been twisted into making Franco-Greco-Renaissance façades. I wanted to run back to Ispahan, to Shiraz, even to the high mud walls of Kerman.

Tehran is the capital of Persia, the city where the marvellous Shah lives, where men and women come for stimulus, where they get courage to struggle against a tradition which at the worst strangles and at the best stagnates. Tehran, with its repulsive exterior, has a mentality which is the hope of the future.

There are people who come merely to be morally or immorally gay, for there are plenty of women, not too expensive, plenty of drink—some curious foreign stuff whose labels are unknown in their country of origin; some local stuff, bad, indifferent and promising to be good some day. There are cafés for dancing where the black bottom wiggles at eleven and you can change hats with your partner by midnight.

There are restaurants with good food. In Tehran you can stay up all night and not get bored. That shows how European it is.

People also come to Tehran to make money faster than is possible in the provinces, to pull political strings that will open the doors of palaces where they may dwell, but there also come men to create a new Persia, to influence the making of laws for increased cleanliness, for better medicine, for freer women, for juster laws, for better education. These people are worth meeting.

The suspicion and fear of one another which exist in the provinces are increased a thousandfold in the capital. Men look round to see if anyone is listening if they make the simplest criticism. Even quite innocent remarks have been interpreted as against the throne. A man came back to Persia after several years in Europe and told his friends that his first evening at Cambridge he had listened to a radio talk on the Shah called 'From Stable to Shah'. The next morning, early, he was taken to the police station and given the choice of prison or a heavy fine, just for that little word 'stable', and yet the Persians admire the Shah because he has risen, is a self-made man. Such an atmosphere is not inevitable, even with the dictatorship, which for the present is probably best. The number of soldiers in or near Tehran was astonishing; it seemed impossible that so many could be needed to protect a man whose existence is essential for the good of the nation. Attempts have been made on his life, but how many is a secret. Newspapers exist in Persia to tell considerably less truth than in many countries.

There is no free press anywhere in Persia, there is no political freedom, men may not meet at any society which could have even a remote possibility of being political. No one will discuss politics with a foreigner until they have complete confidence in him and then they only say what they really think when drunk and in a desert. The result is that progress has to come from the top, for there are no organizations to suggest, to bring pressure or to criticize. Such a condition has a crushing effect upon social responsibility.

The press is constantly praising the Shah. It is difficult to believe that such a capable man, who must believe in his own ability and importance, could want so many daily dozens of fulsome praise. He ought to take the heads of some of the editors in his strong hands and crack their skulls together. But they are only puppets and at times have very foolish lines put into their mouths. They constantly take the attitude that nothing is wrong in Persia. An article stated that every road was safe. That is a lie, for some roads are not safe. Why not tell the truth

when the work the Shah has done in making the country nearly safe is so fine? His work is not finished, but time will put that right. I told Persians time after time that Europeans are not going to despise them because peasants still ride on asses, because there are beggars, because mullahs wear turbans, but they will despise them if they cannot be honest about their limitations, if they will persist in painting the lily white. After a foreign journalist had made some criticism about Persia, the *Messenger de Tehran* had this passage, 13th September 1933: 'Henceforth a greater attention should be given to the identity of foreign travellers and not to allow tourists to travel in Persia who, to make themselves notorious, publish information without foundation on the subject of Persia.'

It sounded as if every tourist would have to have a psychological examination before getting a visa!

An American asked for a visa to visit Persia as part of a world tour, in order to send back notes for school children, but the government refused unless all his notes were censored. A European, long resident in the country, was requested by the government to write articles about Persia for publication abroad. When he submitted these articles to the authorities they removed anything critical and any statement about old habits. As the man was honest, he refused to write any more. He said, 'I like Persians very much but I cannot have them as friends, because I do not make friends with children'. I too liked the Persians very much, but constantly regretted the inability of the majority to face facts.

It is true that most of Persia is dirty, but that is changing—in places changing rapidly. Tehran is not typical of Persia to-day, but, in some good ways, it is a model of what Persia is going to be to-morrow, and Tehran has a number of clean streets. I know, because I lived on one of them; further, the city is divided into four districts, each with a doctor who inspects hotels, cafés and restaurants. I know that too, because I spent several evenings going his rounds. He looked at the onions to see if they were in good condition, the meat fresh, the ice-boxes supplied with a proper quantity of ice, the cakes covered to keep away the flies and the workers healthy. One cook put some meat hastily into the ice-box when the doctor's head appeared around the corner, a kitchen worker began to apologize as he collected the vegetable peelings he had dropped on the floor. Things were not perfect, not by a long way, but they were going in the direction of perfection. After those visits I went, quite happily, into some little cafés which, before, I had feared to visit.

When the poorer Persians stop using the gutters as bathrooms, lavatories, kitchen sinks and laundries, the streets will be much pleasanter. They know that in Tehran, hence have passed local regulations forbidding the people to use the *jubes* for such purpose. At the first offence they have to give up what they have been washing—I do not know what happens when they are washing themselves—or they may merely be warned. The second time they are imprisoned and for the third offence there are both prison and fine. The result is that the main streets of Tehran are, compared with other cities, free from these very insanitary habits, but, of necessity, it will take years to carry out the law when most of the people live in narrow alleys.

Tehran is a huge village with the roadways of a city. You know that the village will go and that the fine wide streets are a promise of the future.

There are three buildings in Tehran worth seeing, the Gulistan Palace, the *madressah* and the prison, but it would not be worth while going to Tehran merely to see them. The city should be visited because of its intelligentsia, because it represents the future of Persia.

The Gulistan is in a lovely garden, more French than Persian, and the palace is delightful, with its staterooms decorated with bits of mirror arranged in designs. I walked round and round, completely fascinated with the fairy-like effect; there is no suggestion of vulgarity or gaudiness. And what carpets! The Peacock Throne must be a delightful place on which to sleep, and the old gold work, inlaid with Persian emeralds, was beautiful. One man who visited the royal collection said, 'This isn't a museum, this is a bazaar', but what can kings do with the things their equals present as gifts?

The Madressah Sipah Salar is a fine series of buildings enclosing a garden, copied from the Madressah Chahar Bagh at Ispahan. It was delightfully clean and especially interesting, because it is the first attempt to reform the Moslem colleges. Nizamul-Mulk founded the first religious college at Baghdad about A.D. 900, where, it is said, there were classes in natural science and mathematics as well as theology. As the years passed it was the fashion for the pious to found religious schools. Until about 1750 they were the principal source of education in Persia, just as the monasteries had been in Europe in the Middle Ages. But from that time onwards the clergy began to appropriate the endowments for themselves and by 1929 there remained only 321 colleges with 349 teachers and 5,532 students.

It was comparatively easy to begin reform with the Sipah Salar College, as that was a recent foundation. By the law of 1931, every student has to pass an entrance examination and enter college for six years in the department of philosophy, religious law or literature. The fifteen best students have free lodgings and maintenance, the next twenty have free lodgings, but the others must pay. According to the law of uniformity of dress of 1928, the students are allowed to wear a Persian coat and turban and *abba*, and if they pass certain examinations are absolved from military service. It is now no longer possible for fools and idlers to use the buildings and money which were left for the good of the nation. There are two views about the schools: some think Persia is no longer in need of a religion, others that a country which has been the cradle of so many religions must still need one, human nature not having changed, and that the colleges should therefore be reformed and reduced to a number commensurate with present needs, the endowments of the others being used for modern secular education.

The students at the Sipah are men who want to be religious leaders, not only for the glory and the power, but because they believe there is a real need for their guidance, men who are scholars and men who are studying to become notaries and solicitors. The authorities hope to add various modern courses, but the staff is at present too small.

The new prison outside Tehran can only be described as a garden prison. It is built on the new radial system, so has plenty of light, but the spaces between the corridors are filled with delightful gardens. The whole place is airy, light, clean, with a nice hospital, excellent kitchens with good food and workrooms that must be paradise to the men who have spent all their days in the dark little rooms off the stinking bazaars. The policy of the prison officials is good too, for the prison is not merely for punishment, but is a place where men may be fitted to go out to start a new life. Each man goes to school for a certain time every day, and for the rest of the time carries on his own craft—shoes, carpets, gardens. If he has none, he is taught a trade. What he makes is sold and the profits divided into three, one part for himself, the second for the prison and the third for his family. The man's share accumulates, so that when leave comes he goes out in the world with a little capital as well as more skill. The ordinary prisoners wear a blue striped garment, but the political prisoners keep their own clothes. The men sleep several in a room, just as they would in their own homes, and, as at home, they drink a great deal of tea. The rich are allowed to have luxuries sent in.

Some of their cells had nice carpets, camp beds, even mosquito nets, and one man was allowed a candle by his bed.

This is where Teymourtash was imprisoned. He was the powerful Minister of Court for many years. Opinion was divided as to whether it was he or the Shah who had devised the policy that has given Persia her new aggressive nationalism, the economic ideal of living on the country, including industrial development, an educational programme in which religion took a back seat and the prosecution of the war against the A.P.O.C. which resulted in what the Persians regard as their great national victory. But there is no doubt that, if he was not the Shah's right hand, he was at least a powerful left. It is generally believed that his imprisonment was the result, among other things, of his complicity in the disappearance of money and the German manager from the National Bank of Persia. There were innumerable rumours, much talking behind doors that were securely locked. People said that when he went in he would never come out, meaning he would be hastened out of this world, but his history of drink and opium alone was enough to finish any man. This amusing story was told of him:

Soon after Teymourtash began his term, while the excitement was still at its height, a soldier gave the alarm that the two hands of a man could be seen on one of the towers. The great man, of course, suggested someone; the prison was surrounded, the alarm given and a firing squad got ready to shoot the prisoner as he tried to escape. The hands were seen again, the shots rang out and—a huge crow fell dead.

The Shah came in person to make enquiries and said to the officer in charge of the firing party, 'The next time you take a crow for a man I'll take you for a dog'.

No insult could have been more offensive, but Tehran laughed for days.

There is hope of having a modern prison for the few women criminals. Persia has not the same type of professional criminal that we have in Europe. One official, not at the prison, said, 'You see, even our criminals have a conscience, they will not hurt women and children, especially they will not attack the very old or poor'. According to him Persia was a land of Robin Hoods.

Some Persians said this prison was as good as a hotel; actually it was superior to many in Persia. The country may indeed be proud of this prison, especially if it is to be the commencement of a reform throughout the provinces. I heard unpleasant tales of torture in provincial establishments, but, when information is needed, torture is not peculiar

to the East. Many Europeans say this prison is just for show, but, whether that was the motive for its construction or not, the prisoners are having the benefit of all that the prison can give in health, education and cleanliness.

The buildings finished, I turned to the Persians to learn something of their life, of music, drama, education, agriculture and medicine.

While at the hospital, a Persian girl sent me a basket full of large white jasmine petals, the outside invisible because so closely covered with asters and leaves. That basket is a symbol of the graciousness of many Persians, of the good side of Tehran. The white jasmine made houses and gardens fragrant during September and October; even offices often had a bowl of the richly perfumed flowers. That girl was as lovely in looks and character as her flowers, but many people who were not lovely presented a bowl of these blossoms when I arrived at their homes. I never liked Tehran, but I did enjoy the friendly spirit with which my hosts stripped this flower from the branches. The ugliness of the city will be forgotten, but there will always remain the remembrance of these flowers, the snowy summit of Demavend, which, at sunset, was like a heavenly rose suspended in the sky.

Music plays a big part in the lives of the middle and upper classes, the most important instrument being the *tar*, which may be soprano, tenor, alto or bass. Many play and vast numbers listen with deep appreciation and emotion, especially to sad music. In Ispahan, at full moon, a great many young men go out to the bridges, drink tea, play and sing far into the night. If a man is a good player, he soon has a large audience. These groups of people sitting on the lovely bridges, enjoying the music intensely, are a very attractive feature of summer life in that old city.

A party is always incomplete without music, and Persians listen in silence. Frequently someone sings or the *tar* may be accompanied by a *dombek*, one or more tambourines and a violin. The *dombek* (the drum) is very important in the ultimate effect, as it gives the strong rhythmic beat which is so extraordinarily sensuous.

It is impossible to realize the value of the *tar* unless played by a clever performer like Shahnazy or Vasiri. Shahnazy's father was also a famous player, but nothing was then known of writing down music, so many of his melodies are lost. There is a club in Tehran, *Iran Javan* (Young Persians), where every foreigner should go to hear good music, to see the clever acting of the best amateurs and to meet the intelligentsia.

The majority of Europeans find the *tar* so dull that it soon becomes a bore, and singing too often sounds no better than cats. This is not all due to our superiority, but partly to our ignorance. Fundamentally we are wearied because we cannot hear quarter tones, but actually the melodies are too often repeated and too monotonous because of lack of harmonies. It is impossible not to realize that the West loses something fine and subtle in not having quarter tones, but a group of Persians, led by Colonel Vasiri, recognizes that a greater vigour and real gaiety could be given to their music by the introduction of some Western methods. Vasiri is very insistent upon the need for joyousness in music and the bad effect upon the character of so much melancholy. Many Persians say, 'But I enjoy being sad'. The East and the West, in music as in many other intellectual developments, can add to the richness of each other's lives.

Colonel Vasiri, aided by some enthusiasts, is trying to modify and improve Persian music and also to write down the melodies in use. There are music-lovers who regard this turning of 'music into notes' as sacrilege, and speak of Vasiri as if he were an enemy instead of one of Persia's best friends. He recognizes that it will take two or three generations to develop the new Persian music, but he is now starting an orchestra, many of the players being Russian refugees, and hopes to give alternate concerts of Persian and European music. There are, he believes, great possibilities in his own native music, for it has two hundred scales and his people will support concerts. There is a good sale for records of Persian music.

Vasiri was trained in France and Germany, so understands and appreciates the Western composers and is sure his country has room for both Western and Eastern music and the new music, characteristic of Persia, which will ultimately be produced. It is a distress to Vasiri and his fellow musicians that so many Persians go to Europe and return with the idea that its music consists only of hotel jazz.

Persians have considerable natural dramatic ability and when given adequate opportunities will be fine actors. Their present inability to unite is a constant drawback. Tehran has several dramatic groups which work in opposition to one another. If they would unite, good professional standards would result. One day I watched an actress being taught her lines, for, although quite nineteen, she could not read. She and her teacher sat at a rough table in a little courtyard while, time after time, he repeated the words. A few evenings later she gave a very good show at the open-air theatre.

Tehran has a cinema-school run by a bright and enthusiastic Armenian. He is producing short films of Persian life, but it is uphill work. He had studied in Moscow and is doing a good job.

The men who are responsible for the educational policy are in Tehran. There is much discontent with the present system, which is founded more on French than on Nordic methods. Many desire that the schools should be practical, that thinking should take the place of memorizing and that the subject in the schools should have some relation to the life of the district. But the Persians have several difficulties to overcome; they have such good memories that it seems wasteful not to use them! They have a curious scorn for anything manual; there was a prince who studied surgery and refused to demean himself by using a scalpel; medical students assured me it was beneath them to learn to cut sections and prepare slides, as that was the work of a laboratory assistant.

A day with a wealthy Persian is an education, for he or she can do nothing for themselves, not even arrange their pillows when about to have an opium-binge. My servant once met me in the street carrying a box of fifty cigarettes; he literally grabbed the parcel, for he knew, even if I did not, how I should behave. Possibly, if craft-courses were introduced in all the schools, the present point of view might change. Perhaps the craft-school in Tehran, which is making really beautiful silks, tiles, etc., may give a new importance to and respect for manual work.

Sa'di has been taught in every school, but there are some educationists who propose to expurgate the lines in which he teaches that fate is stronger than man. 'If two hundred talents are hanging over each of thy hairs, those talents are of no use when fortune is bad.'

Sa'di was apparently an excellent eugenist. 'The whelp of a wolf must prove a wolf at last, even though he may be brought up as a man.' 'Though silver and gold are extracted from stones, yet it is not in every stone that gold and silver are found.'

About two hours north-west of Tehran is the Agricultural School of Kerej, one of the most important and significant enterprises in Persia, which is fundamentally an agricultural country. It is in the immense gardens of a former Shah where, after the dust and dirt of the roads, the visitor finds flowers, fine avenues of old trees and a big wood of immense chenars. The head of the school is an instructed and cultured man who is making the best possible use of what he learned in Europe. When this school has its students scattered all over the country as instructors and as practical owners, has branches in various cities, there will be a chance for Persian agriculture to gain from modern

knowledge. The head was thoroughly sensible in his practical valuation of things old and new; he was not trying to use tractors merely because they were used in Europe, when it paid better to employ a peasant and a bullock. When advisable he would wipe out the old and useless, but always retain anything of value that belonged to the past. There were beds in which Mendelian experiments on sugar beet were being carried out, but they were being weeded by veiled women squatting down with their old-fashioned knives. If all the leading Persians had this sane point of view, the country would be progressing more steadily and surely.

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Visiting schools and institutions was hard work, but sometimes a Persian took me for a picnic.

Outside Tehran there is no country, as we know that word, only desert, some cornfields and here and there, at the base of the Elburz Mountains, large numbers of villages, green spots on the brown, where there are walled gardens with trees and running water. But I wanted to get away, really away, so it was necessary to motor for two hours.

We walked down the street at 7 a.m., when the air was delicious and clean, the sky a lovely child-like covering and the mountains soft, full of delicate colour. But beauty disappeared when we reached the Meidan and a discussion of the price of the car began. The Persian, with his flickering, friendly smile, his gay and gentle eyes, was patient and charming, but the chauffeurs were like tigers. They have an idea that all foreigners, except Russians, are rich and their Persian friends must be rich too, so we pretended to part, and as I walked round the square, the price having been reduced by 50 per cent., the Persian picked me up.

We had soon left the city and were making north for the lovely mountains. It was September, so all the crops were cut, but even hard, dry, brown earth has, on an autumn morning, a purplish-brown bloom that is worth seeing. The good main road was left in a short time and we were on rough tracks, climbing stiffly. On one of them we stalled. But getting out to walk over the stones, seeing the peasants going to the city on their donkeys and asses, was all part of the game. One donkey had a white cock sitting on top of the luggage, its feet tied but its comb erect, looking out on the world as if it were a king. The asses were gay with bells, tassels and blue beads to keep away the evil eye. How much I hoped that Persia would keep all the artistic accoutrements of donkeys, mules and horses even after the superstitions had

gone! After much discussion the chauffeur decided that the car might climb better with less boiling water and off we went.

The foot-hills of the Elburz were round, brown, with soft outlines, still retaining their morning beauty, and behind them were the splendid, gorgeously-coloured mountains. Up and down the precipitous slopes we went until we reached a valley and a river. A river! That was something important in Persia; it was music and movement, cleanliness and a feeling of spring even at the end of summer. We got out of the car and crossed the meadows, passing some peasant women and children gathering the uninteresting, cottony fruit of the sinjan tree. When the fruit is dry it is a treat for a child who cries from pain, who has been punished. Here, as in much of Eastern Europe, where conditions in the country are primitive and people poor, wild fruits may be regarded as a luxury which, in the easier conditions of the West, may only be considered good enough for birds. Watching the children, I decided they were getting as much amusement from those fruits as an English child from a chocolate. I knew they were like pieces of cotton soaked in a little diluted lemon juice, for, with great grace, they had offered some to me.

The village consisted of five families, living on the produce of their fields, but having no fruit. There was no school, no doctor; life was hard, but it was pleasant to spend so many hours just sitting in the sun. Every child had diseased eyes; the Persian, who was a doctor, explained some simple remedies, told them of the future danger if they did nothing, but they just shrugged their shoulders. We foreigners are stupid when we do not realize that hygienic ways can only come slowly.

We left them and went on our way, the Persian planning what he would do for his people in the future. In a short time we reached Lacharak and were guided through the wood by a shabby, gay little man who carried a carpet which he put down on the bank of the river. There we were, installed in our Persian home, for that is what the carpet represented. The water was rather shallow for a bathe, but the Persian directed the peasant to dam up a branch of the river that flowed behind a little islet. Quickly he piled up stones, filled the spaces with earth, and there was a semicircular basin in which, after 2.30, when lunch was well digested and the water had lost a little of its mountain coldness, I was to swim.

The trees at our side of the river were gaily green, the silver-poplar leaves dancing melodiously in the wind that came and went spasmodically, but on the other side there were only barren mountains, high

cliffs and a narrow caravan route that climbed over the river-bed and so to the desert.

The little man soon brought the samovar for tea. We drank it while listening to the gramophone, that played both Western and Eastern music, and the stream, that played universal music. The calm and loveliness of the valley and mountains were splendid after the dust and dirt of the city and the road, but what I enjoyed most was the freedom from the feeling of struggle which I always felt in Persia's newest capital.

We were far from men, but not far from the pastoral life of the country, for at short intervals a man, a boy, drove a flock of donkeys, a herd of sheep or goats, a few cows, across the river, up the bank and so into the woods. The peasants never came near to stare, but purposely avoided us and that piece of Persia that we had appropriated. There is a larger percentage of gentlemen in Persia than in any country in Europe.

I wanted to buy a chicken, so the peasant brought a cock for inspection; about its age I knew nothing, but it had very lovely feathers, so I bought it for half the price demanded and its neck was cut, ceremonially, over running water. When it appeared at dinner in Tehran it had taken too much exercise to get beyond the plates. The Persian servant said, 'When I boil him one year, he then is stone'.

Soon lunch arrived, carried on enormous trays by men who suddenly appeared out of the trees as if by magic. The *kabobs* were good, the eggs fresh, the bread warm from the oven, gritty like much peasant bread, but it had a fine nutty flavour. And the *arak*! It was the kind that produced headache. No matter, there were lovely clouds and I had not seen a cloud for months.

After lunch it was possible to sleep, for the wind blew away the insects. But what an adventure to have a bathe in such cool, refreshing water! I was sitting on the stones drying my nearly frozen feet when a peasant walked along the bank and the Persian, with what sounded like a groan of despair and horror, rushed up to me and covered my back where the bathing garment was scanty.

'But why? He doesn't know us and will certainly never see me again.'

'Oh'—he was breathless—'it would be so shocking to him, so utterly shocking!'

It was as if a sudden, overpowering storm had descended upon our peaceful life in the wild valley; even there, there was no escape from fanaticism.

We found a small house in the wood, a perfect example of Persian

domestic architecture. It had been a royal hunting lodge. We were welcomed by the keeper, his draggled wife and two malarial children. They gave us tea and rosy-cheeked pears. He told us great tales of the wild doings of the snow-leopards in the winter, but keen sportsmen so rarely get a kill that he must have been exaggerating. What would those Tehran editors have done to him when they were so annoyed by an article in a Swiss paper saying that there *were* such primitive and dangerous creatures in the country?

We gave him a lift into Tehran, so he guided us to a royal château, now tumbling into ruin. Being about to fall, its Frenchness has become modified, but how wise had been the Shah who chose that situation for his country palace! We reached it at sunset. At that hour judgments in Persia are always somewhat hyperbolic because the colouring is so magnificent. One might easily be drawn back to Persia just to live from late afternoon to early morning. The palace stood in a garden that had once been well laid-out. Just as we reached the top of the steep path, the mountain behind the ruin was like a tall cliff on fire, the yellowing chenar leaves were dancing lights against the deep-blue sky. At the top we turned; below lay the green garden, beyond were the naked, undulating hills stretching for miles, like earth-waves suddenly transfixed, glowing, soft. The horizon was purple with the Elburz Mountains. We wanted to hold the loveliness for ever, but we could not stop the sun in its rapid going. We were as gods in our delight, we were as nothing in our helplessness.

A broad path led along the side of the hill to the little *anderoon*. What dust of the past! The Victorian lace curtains hung in shreds, the stuffing protruded through the silk covers of the chairs, mouse-eaten tassels swayed in a draught that came through a broken pane, bamboo whatnots were drunken with age and a worn stork stood petrified upon a glass mirror. We stared at this rubbish-heap that must have been brought from England about 1865; from the walls looked down Queen Victoria with her complete family and also a French lady of grotesque anatomy who had forgotten to dress.

This too was Persia.

The ghosts of dead beauties and black slaves were sitting on the chairs. I felt laughter, tears, gossip, hope, fear. 'Let us go quickly', I said, and we raced down the hill, the dry leaves crackling as we passed. But dead leaves are not like dead furniture.

The chauffeur motored quickly along the rough tracks; the deep valleys were already in the night although the summits were still in the

day. In one place the road was so narrow, the slopes on both sides so steep, that we seemed to be moving, tip-toe, along a dull razor-edge. Shepherds were collecting their flocks on the bare hills, each goat companioned by a purple shadow.

Soon we were in Tehran, prisoners once more of the city.

There were other journeys up to the mountain villages, suppers in the gardens of little hotels, walks under the trees when shadows were more real than material things, but best was a day spent at Veramin and Rayi. It was tiresome to have to get a permission from the police for every long journey, but finally they gave me an inclusive permission which took me anywhere for a month. Really much more sensible. The head officials were delightful, generous with tea and cigarettes, but I hadn't gone to Persia to spend hours with them only.

The way to Veramin is flat and dull if you go at the wrong time of the day, but we started at 6 a.m. The remains of the mosque and the tomb-tower at Veramin are interesting and beautiful, but in some details the mosque is too ornate. The tomb-tower is so old and so modern, its simple aspiring lines give it a fine dignity, the shadows cast by the protruding angles make the tower alive. Again at Rayi there was the same type, but much larger. Standing in the disorderly garden, talking to a friendly and intelligent soldier, the distance between East and West again dwindled to nothing. A few weeks later I was in New York, looking at the fine buildings of Radio City; there too were the simple, straight, upward-going lines, with shadows as important as stones. I went from Veramin and Rayi to New York, but my thoughts flew back from New York to Persia.

The only modern building in Tehran which shows any appreciation and understanding of the old architecture is the library of the Bank of Persia. If some philanthropist would only get rid of those absurd bunches of grapes, which might have been copied from a dowdy English public baths or hotel lounge, that library would be beautiful and a fine example to the local architects. It was designed by an Englishman.

The weeks in Tehran passed only too quickly, with plenty of good talk and sometimes good eats. I enjoyed my flat in the Municipal Gardens, except the morning when I found the caretaker had locked me in. Locked me in to keep the robbers out! My servant wouldn't break the lock, so I did.

The garden was full of flowers and fountains, the mountains were not too far away and the days ended with pleasant music, played by a band of keen young musicians who were my friends.

RAIN

WE left Tehran half an hour before the car was due to go. What a miracle! The miracle-maker was a Scotsman whose thin lips shut tight. His eyes were as gay as a jenny wren's on a spring morning, but any amount of *pas fardas* and *inshallahs* must have disappeared when they shut. If the Persian Government would drop its nationalism and put its motor services into the hands of a capable man of that type, things would become efficient and honest. At present even Persians dread to have any business with a garage.

There were a few clouds above the city, but clouds often came in the afternoon, leaving no moist souvenir, so we hoped for a sunny passage as the car went northwards.

What dust! We covered nose and mouth with handkerchiefs as lorry and car passed, each a noisy nebulous something surrounded by whirling sand. The sky had disappeared and there were only clouds. The wind came in gusts, so strong that I thought it would blow my eyes back into my brain; it hurt as it rushed up my nostrils. Sandstorms tore across the desert and engulfed us, so thickly that going was a perilous adventure, or they passed us by, leaping and dashing over the dry earth, racing after one another, hiding the sun, hiding the mountains. Suddenly the car carried us away to clear air, and for the first time in nine months I saw a stormy sunset, the sun fighting the clouds, sending long narrow rays of gold to light up the hurrying sand. A few heavy drops of rain fell, driven by the wind. It was very uncomfortable, but it was magnificent.

On the car sped towards the Elburz Mountains, which we had hoped to see in the moonlight. Never mind. At least we could wrap our coats about us and be cosy in the car. The storm was terrific, but we were on our way to a land of green trees and blue sea.

Night fell and a star shone out of the wreckage which was the sky. Sha'ban, my Persian friend, began to recite poetry. I understood only a word now and again, but even a very stupid person could not fail to hear the rhythm which makes so much Persian poetry like a song. The translation followed in beautiful French.

'A star looked down into a man's heart, carrying to it love and happiness. At first the heart was not big enough, but it grew larger and larger until it could hold infinite light and infinite love. Then the man complained, "My heart hurts", so the star took away that wonderful heart and gave the man a little heart that he could understand.'

At last we stopped in the city of Kasvin, where we had an excellent *borsch* in a semi-Russian hotel, delicious local grapes, good coffee, and we were soon off again. As we ascended the mountains it became colder.

'It is raining', angrily said the Greek woman who sat next the chauffeur. I put out my hand and felt a few drops of clean, cool water. Why was she annoyed when the rain was so beautiful? I became a little homesick for England, where there was plenty of rain and no cruel desert.

More wind! It was so bitterly cold that we wished our coats were thicker. The hail fell noisily, finding its way through the side curtains. The road twisted here and there, but the driver was reliable; we could forget the danger of our going. Now and again the moon escaped from a cloud and shone in through the window. Sha'ban began the poem which Iraj, the poet who died in 1927, had ordered to be carved on his tomb, which was, by his desire, placed close to a road. There were the sounds of the words of the poem, of the gusts of wind, of the engines, but the words were the most real.

'Oh, you who are living or who shall live upon this earth, know that he who sleeps for ever under this stone is Iraj, Iraj who was so much admired when he was alive.

'Here lies the heart of a poet, a heart that was so full of love that it still makes the air of this tomb vibrate with ecstasy.

'When I was alive I never passed a moment without love for my friends, for my beloved. I desired that memories of that love should be buried with me, but the real love I left to you.

'Come! Come! Touch my tomb, sit down a minute near my remains, speak, sing, laugh, remember me, and be sure, be quite sure, that I am with you, sharing all your sorrows and all your joys.

'Play upon the strings of my heart as if it were a violin, making music that will be a song of love for you who are my friends.'

Hour after hour passed. Sometimes we slept a little, sometimes talked, saw a cloud behind, a curving road before or a rock lighted by the lamps. We went up, we went down, and at last were in a flat country where green trees had thick, luscious leaves. The rain fell in

torrents, but a great peace came upon me. Then, for the first time, I knew that the desert and the dryness had terrified me, had been terrifying me for months.

We reached the hotel at Pahlavi at 3 a.m. and, after much knocking, a man who looked like a Russian *moujik* let us in. One of the panes in my room was broken and the rain poured in, but that was not serious, as everything was clean. I soon fell asleep, but was startled by a figure by the bed.

'I've brought my greatcoat', said Sha'ban. 'I've been worrying that you might catch cold.' Persians were always kind and considerate.

Morning came and it still poured, but we had to see the *plage*. We stepped into a gay blue boat and three of the jolliest Persian sailors rowed us across the water, which was getting very annoyed. The wind blew, the rain fell, but we saw the pleasant gardens by the sea, the many lagoons, the simple hotels with tiled roofs that took me back to southern France. How tidy the streets were with their cobbles, how fresh the air, and every building was bright with greenish-blue paint. In the north, by the Caspian Sea, man has to fight mud, which is much more tiresome than dust, so it pays him to make greater efforts. The day was chilly, but down in the wells maidenhair fern was growing, just as it did in the *ghannats* in Kerman, so many hundred miles south.

At last we were in a car on the way to Resht, where we had a splendid lunch in another clean hotel, run by a Russian refugee who knew everything that was necessary. Sha'ban was efficient too, so I was in clover. The waiter was an amusing hybrid, with a Pahlavi cap and a black Russian blouse. The music also was hybrid, for a Persian *tar* was followed by Chaliapin.

Resht has been important, but will probably be killed by the new towns, Ali-abad and Bandar-shah, on the Trans-Persian Railway. There is a story that it was the fine new Russian school in this town that decided the Shah to stop foreigners giving primary education. 'What! the Russians have built a school like that!' said His Majesty. The feeling in the northern towns is not as anti-Russian as in the south, for the people realize the advantage of the near market. The idea of sending their produce thousands of miles to the south while Baku is only twenty-two hours away is not very attractive.

After lunch we started, in another car, for Abr-garm. The sun peeped out only now and again, but who cared? Wasn't everything *green*?

I visited a Persian hospital which was simple but clean and orderly.

They did not know I was coming, so could have made no preparations. The surgeons, trained in France, were doing their best against enormous odds. There were five medical men, sixty-nine beds and one hundred and sixty patients daily. Forty per cent. of the patients had hookworm and nearly everyone malaria. The government has an enormous problem to solve. The people build high sleeping platforms, as the mosquitoes do not rise far above the ground. Doctors would like the government to have clinics where quinine would be free, for, although that would not cure the malaria, it would reduce the virulence of the mosquitoes. The nurses were all Moslems and there was no difficulty in getting them, for European influence, via Russia, has long been strong in the north.

We sped along the roads, everywhere seeing men and things that might have been Japanese—men walking, trousers high above their knees, a long stick slung over their shoulders, and at each end a basket of farm produce; houses covered with rice straw standing on wooden supports to keep them from the damp ground; men carrying ducks, others fish. Never before had I realized the enormous effect of a difference of climate upon the life of a people. We had come only 250 miles, from a dry high land to a moist low land, and things were very different. The people who were not malarial had such surprising gaiety and vitality. I had considered Persians gay, but now realized it was possibly true that they were actually melancholy and cloaked it with laughter in social life. How could they be gay with desert and drought about them? Perhaps, like me, they were a little afraid.

The rain beat down relentlessly. We began to want the sun, which would have shone upon the backs of the wild ducks, the herons, the little tea-bushes, the tall trees.

At last we reached a river where the bridge had been broken so soon after its construction that the engineer had killed himself. I wished that he had had the courage to stick to life and try again, but perhaps he knew that life would be more pitiless than death.

The river was high, rapid and muddy, the banks were a morass, and in it were twenty lorries waiting to be ferried over; one had nearly slipped into the river, but had dropped into a hole on the bank instead. There was one ferry boat that took two cars at a time, a dozen men dragging the ferry up the river, where, at a special point, the boat was freed for the current to bring it to the other side. We waited over an hour before our turn came, when we slid down the muddy bank and on to the ferry boat where there were just a few inches, in front and be-

hind, between us and the angry river; up the other muddy bank we climbed and so on to a road. There was a possibility that it would be flooded and we would have to return, but fortunately the floods had subsided enough for us to go, but splashily. If we had skidded it would have been unpleasant, but we had taken the precaution to insist on new tyres.

I fell asleep, to be waked in a town where the chauffeur said we had better have a meal, for he did not know when we would arrive, if ever. We bought some of those curious Angora pears which look so unattractive and taste rather good, but were still hungry. There was no hotel, absolutely no place for a foreign lady, said the chauffeur, but why shouldn't I see what the natives did in a ragged place like this? So, with a sort of do-or-die feeling, Sha'ban pushed me into a tea-house. It certainly was dirty, but everyone was friendly. A thin, brown-eyed boy was cooking *kabobs* over a charcoal fire in a lovely brass mangal.

'They look good, don't they?' But Sha'ban thought we had better stick to tea.

Another man, in an indescribably dirty vest and some sort of trousers, was beating eggs, very fresh; another, his shirt still dirtier, was mincing meat in an American machine.

'The meat's fresh enough', said Sha'ban.

We went into the non-kitchen part of the tea-house and sat down on a rickety bench at a rickety table. Behind us was a staircase which was just a little better than a ladder, leading to an upstairs apartment, and around the walls was a ledge covered with rush mats, where two men sat smoking. One, old and rosy-cheeked, smiled at us as if we were two Christmas toys. I thought of a Russian ballet I had seen in the far land of Europe. I smiled back, ordered tea and went for a journey of inspection. The dirt was almost fascinating, the floor was slippery with onion-skins, radish-tops, egg-shells and bits of bone, but I was also fascinated by the freshness of the food and the very good smell.

'Let's have supper here', I said cheerfully.

'But you've never been in such a place before', said Sha'ban.

'No. That's the reason. The eggs are fresh, the butter is lovely, none of that horrid *rogan*. I'm having an omelette.' But he ordered *kabobs*.

The waiter cut the bread against his brawny chest and brought it in his hands. 'Have it toasted', I said, 'to kill the germs'.

The omelette was a round preparation in which four lumps of chopped meat were embedded. Just as I began, the old man jumped

down and put some salt on to it and later jumped down again to add some pepper. He went to a bowl in the corner which was filled with bits of radishes and, after excavating with a grimy finger, presented us each with a piece of radish, cut with his knife. I thanked him with an angelic smile.

'I can't eat it; whatever shall I do?'

Sha'ban replied, 'Oh, go on smiling at him and drop it on the floor. Your omelette right?'

'Absolutely delicious, and the bits of meat are so good that I must have another. And your *kabobs*?'

'Try.'

I was just getting a piece from his plate when my fork broke. The old man doubled up with laughter and everybody was summoned to enjoy the joke. One of the cooks brought another, wiping it on the tail of his shirt as he came!

'A glass of boiling water', I demanded, and used it to sterilize the fork. 'That's done for the dirt', I said in triumph.

When they started to make the second lot of *kabobs* the old man assisted; he chose the pieces of meat that were to be minced, he chose the onion after much smelling, he added the salt, then gave us each a piece of raw onion. 'That's for love', he said, with a hilarious smile. Weeks later I learnt that onions were considered aphrodisiacs.

Back the old man went on to his perch, but his eyes never left us. He had a serious consultation with the cook before the *kabobs* were dished up. He had exact ideas about how long they should be cooked.

They were good, we told him, the best I had ever eaten, and I had had them in the most elegant place in Tehran as well as in every other town in Persia. Sha'ban agreed that they were unique. The old man said that the sheep were excellent in Mazanderan because they have rich grass, and the eggs, butter and onions were equally affected by the sun, the rain, the pleasant sea air. 'And I put in just the right amount of pepper and salt', he said proudly.

But, as I cut the third *kabob*, the second fork broke just like the first. That did bring down the house. Even the cook stopped cooking.

'I'll eat the rest with my fingers', I said, and as I picked up the meat the old man nodded with approval. 'Only recently have we had any forks here.'

The motor-horn sounded. That meant we must go. I was sorry, for I wanted another *kabob*. I liked the old man who had hovered over us, but we went with his blessing.

On again the car sped, this time through thick forest. We gave a lift to a stranded soldier, much to the annoyance of the chauffeur, but Sha'ban took the opportunity to deliver a lecture on the duty of helping the men who might some day lay down their lives for their country. At ten o'clock we reached Abr-garm, where the Shah has laid the nucleus of the first Persian spa. There was a mild smell of sulphur in the air, but we were interested only in sleep. The place was in a mess because it was being redecorated in preparation for a visit from His Majesty. The servant found clean sheets and I was soon asleep.

I awoke next morning to find the room painted white, the windows screened with netting and a door leading on to a balcony, from which there was a splendid view: below was the garden with the bath-house and a charming bungalow, while on the left the mountains, covered with trees, rose high, and on the right flat wooded land stretched away to the sea. It was an ideal situation. The plan is to surround the hotel with bungalows, lay out extensive gardens and make a straight road to the sea, where there is a sandy beach. The rain had stopped, it was a glorious morning. I ran to the verandah on the other side of the hotel, just in time to see the sun rise over the Caspian.

There had been so much rain that, temporarily, there were no mosquitoes, so it was safe to have all our meals, which were quite good, on the verandah in sight of sea and forests. We walked up into the mountains, where the trees grew close together and were bound into a semitropical jungle by thick, wild grape-vines. In the forest were wild pomegranates, cherries, plums and apricots. We hired horses to take us long distances by narrow trails and every day the car drove us to the sea, as the new road had not yet been started. I undressed in the car, the chauffeur and mechanic being sent away and told to keep out of sight while I bathed, as it would have been highly scandalous if their uneducated eyes had seen a European woman in a bathing garment. The sea was always too rough for swimming, but the water was just pleasant at noon on those mid-October days.

The bazaar was always an entertainment, with the women in their quaint if rather ugly clothes, for they had a way of tying an enormous knot of material in front, which made them a ridiculous shape. Their velvet jackets were often a lovely colour, but were very unpractical and much too hot. They were all pleasantly friendly, with a most unusual lack of fear of being photographed. But it was heartbreaking to see the victims of malaria, thin, wretched, just managing to drag themselves along the roads. The Shah had had the rice-fields removed for some

distance from the spa to reduce malaria, but I wanted to root it up from all those hundreds of miles and drain the land. No food can be worth so much suffering.

The bathing establishment was clean and pleasant, the bath producing a skin as soft as a child's. There are a number of springs, both hot and cold. The hot sulphur water comes out of the earth at 120° C. and reaches the baths at 65° C., so that rheumatics can be well heated, if the doctor agrees. One day, when the doctor was having a holiday, the attendant wandered about looking like a ruffian, but Sha'ban insisted upon his dressing properly before he arranged my bath and handed out the towel, which was fixed together with a label to show it had been washed and not used. That spa will make history in Persia.

After a few peaceful days we sped on to the railway, that undertaking which seems foolish to many Europeans but glorious to most Persians, for they believe it is the key to economic, social and political progress. It is being started simultaneously from the north and from the south. The northern section, from the Caspian to Tehran, is to be completed by 1939. The Danish firm which has the present contract is doing good work.

The railway is both economic and strategic. Troops can be moved quickly to Luristan, which will not be quiet for some years, and the men of Mazanderan, who are said to be more personally devoted to the Shah than any other Persians, can be taken over the Elburz Mountains to disturbed areas.

Economically it means that produce from the Caspian littoral—rice, cotton, tea, silk—can go to Europe via the Gulf, Baghdad, or Baghdad and Haifa, and so the economic (and indirectly political) dependence upon Russia can cease. Russia, it is hoped, will no longer have its strangle-hold on Persia. If a suitable treaty were made with Iraq, the difficulty and cost of taking goods across the frontier might be reduced to nothing. Haifa might be made a free port. It is a long way from Mazanderan to Europe, but goods can be produced there at such a low rate that even with the costs of a long sea voyage they may pay. The charges in the Suez Canal are already reduced and further reductions may be forced upon the company by the rival route across the desert from Baghdad to Haifa. When this railway is completed the next need will be to connect the Iraq border with Ispahan; there are a number of business men who regret that a cross-country railway was not planned, as it could have followed the valleys instead of crossing so many mountain ranges.

The question of railway versus motor-service is complicated. The ordinary road costs one-tenth of a railway, and if buses were made for from ten to twenty people they could provide the ice and cooled air which are essential for desert-travel. An ordinary car can never be satisfactory except for night travel. But there is a big psychological factor. Persia has an idea that a railway is an essential part of modernization. She is going to be very proud of that railway, whether it pays or not.

One of Persia's difficulties is that she has no rubber, so that in a war motor-cars would be much less convenient than a railroad. Some who know the Orient well believe that the Orientals have often a much more true vision than the specialists. With their fundamental calm, they can think in longer terms and have a genius for balancing one set of factors against another.

The railway is being so well made that the future difficulty may be to keep the rolling stock in order, rather than the line.

Europeans are having trouble with the workmen because they are lazy; their demands are too easily satisfied. But fortunately, with the weakening of Islam, they are drinking and smoking cigarettes. Both are expensive, so men must work harder to get money for these luxuries which so rapidly become necessities. It is paradoxical, but true, that within ordinary limits of drink, alcohol thus becomes a stimulus to work.

The railway from the Caspian to Tehran might have excellent effects upon the life and health of Persia if rice and its attendant mosquitoes were abolished, for the Caspian coast could become a glorious playground for the country and its fields and sea produce an abundance of much-needed food.

We returned to Resht on a lovely sunny day, crossing the river easily and quickly. A dead bear was being carried down the swift stream and above us stretched an unusually vivid rainbow. We spent the night at Resht, where there was another good meal, the butter fresh, the milk creamy. I thought of the villages we had passed, so like Europe with houses spaced about a green common, where cows and sheep were having a good time, and was sorry for the animals by the Gulf, who were doing their best on fish and dates.

We started for Tehran four hours late, for the last passenger took an hour to arrange his luggage, as he suddenly had an idea it would be better to resew his bag of special local flour. He had no knife to cut the string, but, a voluble and sympathetic audience of nine having collected, the cord was cut by rubbing one stone against another. It is

a method that takes time. Next he decided that a new string would be better and that needed a new needle for sewing.

The northern side of the Elburz Mountains was beautiful, with great rivers or river-beds and forest-clad hills. At moments I thought I was in Wales, in the Tyrol, in the Rockies, but never in Persia. We stopped for lunch in a village where olive trees grew, some very old, others young and some very young. There are good olives to be bought in Tehran, but as yet no good olive oil.

Little by little the trees disappeared and we were back in the dry land of Persia, travelling over the bare mountains. The Elburz has two very different faces: all green and soft on the north, all hard and barren on the south, but it is that southern side where the colours at dawn and sunset are so beautiful. In the morning the mountains had been blue ahead of us and ten hours later they were blue again, but by then we had left them behind.

Suddenly night fell and we reached Tehran in the dark.

We had been to the land of rain, we had come back refreshed and serene.

I LEAVE PERSIA

AN unexpected telegram made it necessary to leave Tehran in two hours if I was to catch the cargo-boat which was taking me from Basra to England, via New York. I did not want to give up the delightful engagements which were to have filled the last three days, miss saying good-bye to friends or leave so much undone and unknown.

Unfortunately when travelling in Persia it is always necessary to allow plenty of margin, for no one can predict how many hours *en route* might have to be spent in watching men mend tyres, hammer screws and treat the radiator to erratic doses of water. Again I put myself in the hands of that clever Scotsman, who provided a car and chauffeur which dashed across to the Iraq rail-head at Khanequin without a stoppage, an accident or a moment of anxiety.

Without a topee I should certainly have had concussion, for as we tore along the bumpy roads I spent almost as much time hitting the hood as resting on the seat. When we reached Hamadan for a short sleep, I was so shaken that I could not stand when I got out of the car.

Only the last few miles were tiresome, for during those late October days there were beauty, light and colour on the mountains all day long.

As we crossed one mountain range after another, I saw the sun set and the sun rise for the last time in Persia and was sorry to leave such loveliness. Now that I am back in England I realize the difference; here we have a quiet, serene beauty, but there it was exciting.

'I am sad to leave your country', I said to a Persian at the frontier, just as the chauffeur was slipping in the clutch.

'I hope you have had the best thing, that in which we excel all other nations', he replied eagerly.

'What can that be?' I questioned, leaning out.

'Love', said he gravely, as we sped away.

Persia was interesting and surprising from the first moment till the last.

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